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ALL-STORY

COMBINED WITH MUNSEY

Love Stories of the American Girl

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Ethel Donoher
Ruby M. Ayres

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" Sorry, but you'll have to come with me. You're under arrest!"

An Offer of Marriage

By BERTA RUCK

CHAPTER I

ROMANCE ON THE EIGHT FIFTEEN

THIS is the story of an offer of marriage that happened in the wrong way.

Start: the family breakfast table of the girl.

She was Frankie Carter. Age, nineteen. Occupation: receptionist at Mme. Cytherea's Beauty Shoppe in Fifty-Seventh Street. Appearance: pleasing; blond, smallish, electrically alive.

Her father, from behind his newspaper:

" *Man proposes, Heaven disposes* it used to be; then came *Man proposes, Woman disposes.* Nowadays it's more like: *Woman proposes, Woman disposes—Woman runs the show!*"

Her mother, from behind the coffee set: " *Woman proposes?* Tom, how can you say such things? Woman? Proposing? No nice girl dreams of it!"

" Perhaps not, sweetheart. But listen to this: ' It is Woman who chooses the man she wishes to annex, Woman who takes the initiative in attracting her prey. The more Woman seems to shrink from pursuit, the more definitely is she the Huntress.' "

" Tom! These *disgusting* modern ideas!"

" Modern? Bernard Shaw wrote that before these children were born."

" I am glad to say," announced Mum, looking down her short, pink nose, " that I never read him. I prefer *nice* books and plays."

Mum still imagined that everything

had stayed as it was in the beginning, before the War, before the Peace, before the Talkies, the Radio, her marriage, the arrival of her children—George, Win, Francesca, and Sonny—before *anything*.

Frankie thought: "Mum always fluffs up her feathers at what everybody else has known for *ages*. Such as women fliers, pyjama parties, cocktails, lip sticks, and moonlight dips."

It was true.

While Nineteen-Thirty went on happening, Mum went on thinking Eighteen-Ninety-Eight.

"A *nice* girl waits until she is *chosen*. No nice man thinks much of a girl who doesn't."

"Where," demanded Frankie, in a voice crisper than the toast she buttered, "where are the nice *men?*"

"Frankie!" protested Mum. Mum *respected men*. It didn't matter what men. Young or old, married or single, handsome or a caricature, she deferred to them. Whether it was her husband, the mailman, Sonny's school-teacher, the garbage man, or George's boss, Mum looked up to any member of that sex.

"Mum, you're so marvelous to be *able* to feel like that. I couldn't. Look at the men you see on the way to business!"

"I hope no daughter of mine thinks of doing such—"

"I sometimes look at young men in the train. I sometimes look at young men in the subway. But don't be frightened, Mum. What do I see? Sheep in fedoras. Dim bulbs in drab overcoats. No backbone, no pep, no fire. Gaping at the baseball news. Nothing to say, even to each other; except '*Here! Have one of mine.*'"

Dad chuckled.

Mum, coldly: "I am sure one *never* sees any young men like that. Does one, Win?"

But Win Carter, who worked in Jamaica and was engaged, had fled for her bus.

"Ask your brother. George, wouldn't any nice man simply hate it if a girl—"

"Took the words out of his mouth? I should say so! If any wench had the nerve to propose to me—"

"You'd be bucked to the eyes," Frankie flung at him, "if any decent-looking girl took so much notice of you!"

"I should be livid," contradicted George, "if any girl imagined I hadn't the get-up-and-get to do my own proposing."

Here he rose and, pretending to compare his wrist watch with the dining room clock, gave a look in the mantelpiece mirror at his tie, a Christmas present for which Heaven knows how much lunch money had been squandered by George's Latest.

GEORGE was twenty-four, and, of a good-looking family, perhaps the star. He had his sister's bright hair, her impertinent profile, made masculine. He had, too, the assurance that comes from the sense of being a mother's favorite son. This enters into the soul of a boy baby before he is old enough to think, and nothing can take away from the confidence thus acquired. With that confidence he is armed against Life, hard knocks, harder women. It is the most useful gift a mother can bestow. Conceit helps many a man to win. Frankie did not see why oldest sons should always be favorites. She resented George. Perhaps this colored her whole attitude to his sex.

Gazing fondly upon him, his mother said: "There, Frankie! Now you hear

what the Best Kind of Young Man does think."

"I don't agree!" flared up little Frankie. "I agree with Dad and Bernard Shaw. I believe any sensible modern young man (if any) would be—well!—sensible and modern and *grateful* if any worth-while girl told him she liked him well enough to marry him!"

"No daughter of mine could mean what you say—"

"Couldn't she! Couldn't I!" cried this rebel, springing to her feet, for time was speeding toward eight fifteen. Frankie was already hatted and shod for her last-minute dash to the train. A decorative figure of defiance she made, with her cheeky, amusing little creamy oval face—on which she left little more eyebrow than there is on a sugared almond — her hand-painted mouth of sealing wax scarlet, and the cleft in her chin so rebelliously tilted over a white collar like a cuff. For all this was just before Fashion commanded the modern girl once more "to become feminine." Frankie Carter still dressed like half a boy. She still thought like half a boy. She still spoke like one.

Grabbing her purse, she launched, through half a mouthful of marmaladed toast, her ultimatum. "Personally, I'll think nothing of making an offer of marriage to the first young man I like the looks of!"

Curious, the ensuing pause in that cheerful, ordered breakfast room.

It was as if there had spoken, through the pretty, flippant, made-up mouth of "modern" girlhood, some shameless Power. Then Frankie broke into her gayest laugh.

"Calm yourselves, people. It won't happen—"

"Well, I should *hope* not—"

"And why, Mum? Because there isn't such a thing as a man I like the looks of!" Frankie's whole vital little face was a dare to Fate. *You can't touch me, you can't touch me.* "There's no such thing as a young man worth proposing to!"

She dashed for the front door.

Two seconds later, George galloped after her; then came Sonny on his push-bike, haring it for school. Dad, off to his insurance office, was the last, and nearly late! He had lingered to smooth the ruffled feelings of Mum.

"Mum hasn't any *sense*," thought Frankie as she dashed along. All Mum had were her little feet, those hands that looked as if they'd be no use to drive a car, those big eyes, and that skin. That's all, yet Dad, who was intelligent, Dad, who even in appearance was miles ahead of these cake-eaters, still brought chocolates home to Mum. Crazy about her! Seeing her as the Girl of Eighteen still, and making her life one grand sweet Girlhood.

There *were* such men—or *had been* such men.

Frankie pelted along the platform, thinking: "I can't imagine any of these Nineteen-Thirty Models"—here she began battling through the mob of them—"making life at forty grand or sweet for me!

"Not that I want them to," thought independent little Frankie, swinging herself into the train. "When or where does one ever see a young man any self-respecting girl would have the slight—*the very slightest use for? Where—?*"

She tried to open the window; the car was full of yesterday's air. The window stuck.

"Here—let me," put in a pleasant voice.

There beside her stood the young

man about whom there was to be all the trouble.

AS a rule Frankie didn't "let" men do things for her; couldn't they see that she was capable of opening and shutting windows for herself?

She found herself "letting" this man; but he was an exception to the general run with whom she usually traveled speechlessly to and from the Penn Station. He was, in fact, a man you could actually look upon as a man.

All alert, she took in details, she wondered: "What is he? An athletic stockbroker? Clever, but *not* highbrow. *Nice.* Has he a wonderful figure, or is it just that overcoat padded in the shoulders and built waisty in the waist? Long muffler—at least three yards of stripes. Probably his best girl spent—"

Here the pleasant, vibrant voice asked, "Is this enough?"

Frankie thanked him.

The young man's smile was like turning up a better light, and he had beautiful teeth. He sat down beside her, and the damp spring air came in.

Immediately an old gentleman sitting behind them—an old gentleman of the Fidgety-Porpoise species that infests railway cars—turned up his coat collar and emitted snorts: "Young women nowadays. No idea of what's due to their elders. No thought for the comfort of other people."

Striped-Scarf's glance at Frankie seemed to say: "Sorry" and "Never mind!" as he pulled the window down again.

Take a look at this large, well-built, well-turned-out young man. His name, which Frankie was not yet to know, was Robert Bristow Sevening. His age was thirty-three; perhaps a man's best age, since he retains many impulses of youth while he has shed certain crudities. He was a Someone in the Business World and "white all through."

While the train jolts on, take—as Frankie could not take—the opportunity of listening-in to his meditations. The girl's got a nice voice. All this violent make-up quite unnecessary for a pretty kid. Wonder what she's like without a hat? About two gold hairs showing on each cheek. Collar, tie, shirt and jacket as if pinched from her brother's room. Uncommonly smart, but I'd like to see her in a pretty frock. Feet and ankles It. Must dance divinely.

Here the train pulled up at a station. The old gentleman porpoised out. The two young people looked at each other, smiling, and started a conversation which lasted to New York.

Thus ordinarily the idyl of Frankie's life began.

It went on. It went on for several mornings. Having begun, would it not have been imbecility to discontinue? This, as Frankie often reminded her mother, was the beginning of the Nineteen-Thirties instead of the dark days when it was impossible for a decent girl to enter into conversation with the Unintroduced Male!

His dog was a white bull terrier; he smoked the cheapest cigarettes he could get and hadn't much time for shows. That was now as much as she knew of him.

As for what he knew of her?

"Intriguing little face! Keen turnout, a waft of scent and face powder, a laugh, a glance, a dash of *chic,* of pep, the twinkling of nimble legs on and off the train step. Net result, half an hour of sunshine to start one's usual unspeakable day." Thus thought the

Unintroduced Male, and continued to travel by the early train.

A week later the train was held up for half an hour one morning, and everybody in that car grouse—grouse—groused except Frankie and her new friend. Old friends they seemed by now. On the following day his business did not bring him to town until afternoon.

THAT spring day opened cold as midwinter, rainy, foggy. Breakfast had been horrid. Mum had had hers in bed. Dad took cover behind his paper. Win had had a tiff with Ronald—her betrothed—both brothers Carter had got out of bed the wrong way. Then George's car refused to start, after Frankie had waited and waited, so she had to rush down the road, through rain, rain, rain, of the kind that finds every least crack between a girl's hat and her hair, her neck and her coat, her goloshes and her stocking tops. Hurling herself, wet and miserable, into the moving train, Frankie found "nobody" on board.

All the way to town the fog grew thicker, and they were forty-eight minutes late at Pennsylvania. There was "nobody" there either. Further, Frankie left her library book in the train and lost her handkerchief-puff.

Business that day was *so* terrible that one independent business girl could have envied girls who had nothing to do but stay in their good homes. Clients were in foul tempers. Even Mme. Cytherea, that sweet lamb! was snappy; the hair-drying machine went *phut*, and the hairdresser, giving in his notice, said he was going to take on a job in a lightship.

Miss Smith, the assistant, asked: "Why in a lightship, Mr. Evans?" He growled: "That's the only job left where a man can be sure he don't have to take no orders from no *women!*"

The day, badly begun, closed in glory. Fog cleared off in time to show a sunset of amber shot with gold. Rain stopped, leaving the world washed and clear. There was a little white new moon also—but could that be the important factor? Striped-Scarf was in the home train. It was not until the conductor came round that Frankie discovered she had left her commutation ticket in her forgotten library book, and that she was a quarter short.

"Thank you, sir," said the conductor as Striped-Scarf produced a handful of mixed silver. "Ho! Good evening, Mr. Sevening!"

"Good evening, Harwood. How are you these days?"

"Oh, nothing to grumble at, sir. Nice evening, sir."

A wonderful evening, Frankie thought, a strangely wonderful, beautiful evening.

"You'll trust me till to-morrow morning?"

"Oh, I'll trust you longer than that. In fact, I shan't be going up to town to-morrow."

How did it happen? How, suddenly, did that borrowed quarter loom and become so important? It became an excuse, an introduction. They had to get out at the same station. As if he had for years been in the habit of seeing Frankie home, Striped-Scarf started along the street with her.

He was remembering something: *"If you want to know what a girl is like, go to her home and have a look at her mother."*

Frankie swung along as if this were no occasion in her life. A chauffeur in a long, shining car touched his hat to Mr. Sevening, and the tall young man in the striped scarf just smiled and

walked on through the cold freshness of the spring evening. Down the road with electric lights, budding magnolias, shingled bungalows in rows, one like the other. Except that nothing is alike, nothing like anything else, under the glamour of that rainbow in which Frankie was walking.

JUST before they reached the front gate they overtook her father.

"Hello. Let me have a quarter, Mr. Carter, will you?" demanded his child. "This is Mr. Sevening."

Followed the first evening in which Frankie knew what it was to be nervous about a visitor who stayed to family supper. But she soon saw it was going to be all right. How grateful she felt suddenly for her mother.

With dad, of course, Sevening got on; with George he discussed football. Sonny approved of him because he was the first visitor who had ever looked at his puppy without asking what kind of dog she was.

Fervently grateful Frankie felt that Mum was one of the old-fashioned women who kept a different face for looking at men. Always when she turned to the guest she had that expression of "Men-are-such-great-strong-things."

Well, to-night she had something in men worth respecting, thought Frankie.

After supper they pushed the furniture to the wall and danced to the radio.

"Dances as I knew she would," thought Sevening, as the girl's step melted into his.

Into the music the voice of the leader of the band broke, brazened by the loud speaker:

"I'm flying high! But I've got a feeling I'm falling,
Falling for no one but you."

Frankie, spinning, thought: "Many a true word is spoken in jazz."

She, who was truthful even with herself, was facing a fact. "Gosh," she thought, "after having been immune all these years! After not giving a hoot for any young man—after all, look at them! I'm going off the deep end for this one. He is the Only One. What's to be done about this?"

He was thinking that this cheeky, amusing, violently made-up little Frankie was one of the most delightful girls he had met. Notice that "one of the"; it marks his attitude to the girl who had made up her mind that he was the Only young man. For she was, alas, "sickening" to take Love badly.

Yes, Frankie was hard hit.

He was still far distant from this stage. Anything might yet happen.

ON the way to town next morning Sevening said that "Frankie" was so right for her.

"Delightfully sincere. No nonsense about you. You mean what you say. That's what *I* like!"

Wouldn't any girl have been pleased?

Well, not Mum, perhaps, thought Frankie; Mum might not have cared to be liked *because she meant what she said*. She would prefer to be noticed for those big, appealing eyes—

"Where is it that you work, Frankie?" he asked later.

"Mme. Cytherea's beauty shoppe."

"*What—?* I—I didn't know—" said her friend in startled tones.

"Why the surprise? Why shouldn't I work there?"

"Oh, why not?"

But he thought swiftly: "Lord, why must she? Cytherea's, of all places!"

"Well, what d'you do there?" he asked aloud. "Rule the permanent waves of lovely society ladies, paint the lily—"

"Oh, I don't give treatments! I'm the receptionist."

Frankie prattled on about her work, little guessing that he had made a fortune in just such places. Something of a shock it would have been to know this big he-man owned *Cytherea* and *Hebe's* in New York, *Beatrice Barrie* in London, and branches of both in Paris.

"Shows all over town employ receptionists to coo at clients. Why must Cytherea's hit upon this kid?"

The innocent Frankie went on trying to amuse him.

"Mme. Cytherea is a dear. Thick, real-silver shingle, looking as if she'd just got it oxidized. Slim as a blade of grass! *And* sweet."

She grew enthusiastic, excited by the admiring looks he gave her.

"Your gentle boss," commented Sevening as the train slowed down into the station, "can also hold down her job?"

"Rather. *Madame* deserves to be rolling in dividends and cars. She would be, too, if Cytherea belonged to her, instead of that bloated old speculator who owns the place, but never puts his nose inside it," wound up Cytherea's receptionist. The train stopped, and the anonymous owner of a dozen such beauty shops helped her across the chasm to the platform. "I'm sure his nose is like some bird of prey's, and that he'd be—"

"Mr. Sevening?" interrupted the honest, courteous, but quite uncompromising voice of the big policeman who stepped forward just as Frankie and her escort were moving through the gate. "Sorry, but I'll have to trouble you to come with me. I have a warrant for your arrest."

CHAPTER II

WHAT EVERY WOMAN WANTS

THAT morning Mme. Cytherea's receptionist worked like a girl in a dream, a bad dream.

What—what could be the meaning of the happening at Penn Station?

Could she have imagined it? No, it had happened. A stalwart figure wearing the familiar dark blue uniform of New York's police force had arrested Robert Sevening, the one and only man of Frankie Carter's world.

What had he done?

Nothing, of course, decided the girl indignantly. But what could the police imagine he had done? Oh, what a nightmare! He had lifted his hat to Frankie as he turned away with the policeman.

Men may be arrested, but women must work. Frankie that morning was busy over accounts. The firm's chartered accountant — a blameless youth known at the shop as "Ivor Novello"—came in to look at the books. Frankie, as a rule sunnily friendly to all she met in her day's work, was this morning inclined to snap his head off. Here was this young man, his own master, free as air — and there was Robert Sevening in the hands of the police.

"I'm not hungry, somehow," said Frankie when Miss Smith asked if she was coming out now. She worked furiously through the lunch hour.

She answered absent-mindedly when people spoke to her; all she could think of was the Beloved, unjustly accused of unknown crime. "Terribly under the weather is pretty little Miss Carter to-day," thought *madame*.

Late in the afternoon there was a rush. The telephone rang; the mail came; the boy called from the wholesale perfumery, and there entered, all at once, three clients: "a Face" for Miss Smith, "a Water-wave" for Mrs. Evans, and a lady who wanted a special green eyelid cream and a chance to pour out to Mme. Cytherea her grievances.

On the very day of this client's specially arranged dinner-and-theater party, she had been badly let down; deserted both by a daughter and by the other girl guests on whom she'd counted. At the last moment! When she urgently needed some Snappily Bright Young Thing to amuse an important guest!

"He's a multi-millionaire, if you please, and I'm trying to get him to do something presently for my boy in South America. He's just come from there, so I wanted to give him an entertaining time—but, now, of course, the entire party will be ruined. Every amusing and pretty girl I know is dated up. I suppose, Meg, you — you couldn't tell me where to go for an adequate, well-turned-out, attractive dinner partner for my man?"

This, Frankie Carter, sitting at her desk, heard, as it were, out of the back of her little bent neck. She was conscious of a slight pause, in which glances were exchanged over her head.

Madame said pleasantly: "Miss Carter?"

Frankie turned round with her business smile.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed the client, who was deeply furred and brilliantly painted. "Exactly what I meant." She beamed upon Cytherea's receptionist. "This would do beautifully. Could she be persuaded?"

"Could you, Miss Carter?"

"Be persuaded to—?"

"Join my party to-night," explained the client, whose motherliness shone through her make-up. "Dinner at the Ritz, afterward to the Ziegfeld, and then on somewhere to dance. It would be a real kindness if you'd fill the gap."

Now Frankie also had gaps to fill that evening. Here was the chance of forgetting—at least for a little. "What time is dinner, please?"

"Early; ten to seven. It is now," added the client, glancing at her jeweled wrist watch, "a quarter to six."

Alas!

Frankie shook her small, smoothly gold head.

"I couldn't get home to dress. I'm so sorry. I live out on Long Island."

But eagerly the client said that did not matter. Her little scamp of a daughter, who had let her down, and gone away on a visit to a party that promised to be more amusing, had a wardrobeful of nice clothes. She was Miss Carter's height and figure, or so near it as did not matter, and she herself—her name was Mrs. Bartlett-Smith—had an excellent maid.

Would Miss Carter drive home with her then and there?

Miss Carter would.

THE Bartlett-Smith mansion was on Upper Park Avenue, but there was hardly time for the substitute guest to take in what the house was like—except that every rug and stair carpet gave you the feeling of sinking past your ankles into luxury—that the furniture appeared to melt into you where you sat, and that there suddenly grew into your hand a cocktail like a frozen flame. Even Frankie's anxiety about Mr. Sevening was abated. She thought, "Of course he'll be able to explain that he *hasn't* forged

a check *or* diverted funds, or whatever they think he's done— It will be all right! It must."

"Come up," said Mrs. Bartlett-Smith, "and dress in my girl's room."

One entire wall of that large and perfect bedroom was hidden by immense framed photographs of Mr. Adolphe Menjou, Mr. Ronald Colman, and the very new man, Mr. Gavin Gordon.

"Thanks, Mr. Sevening," said the conductor. So for the first time Frankie heard his name

"How can girls be crazy about movie stars?" Frankie wondered, "except—well, Gavin Gordon *is* rather like—" Back came the stabbing thought of that face over the striped scarf. Frankie put it aside, remembering something else.

"I haven't rung up my home! I must let them know I shan't be back to-night until late."

Hospitable Mrs. Bartlett-Smith protested. "Oh, but, my dear! You mustn't think of late trains. You'll probably have to dance with our multi-millionaire until 3 A.M., and then you must come back here and spend the night comfortably in my girl's bed and her pyjamas. You'll have your breakfast brought to you in peace at any time you say, and the Rolls can come round to take you to Meg's—or *Salome's,* or *Jezebel's,* or whatever the poor dear calls herself—whenever you've got to get there. It's the only possible plan."

Gladly Frankie accepted. Indeed, the little worker had hardly been looking forward to that bleak return journey in the early morning local, finally

reaching home numb with cold and misery.

"I'll tell my people, if I may."

She took off the satin-skirted Spanish doll which hid the telephone, and called the number.

Waiting, her thoughts returned to that prisoner. How frightful if he should be sentenced, he, an innocent man, to a term of years. If she could only find out something about it! Why must this calamity happen?

Voice of her brother George sounded over the wire. Was it her imagination that his "Hello" sounded as if he'd heard something?

"WHO'S that? Frankie? What's this? Staying all night in town? All right, I'll tell Mum. May one ask who you're going out with? Bartlett-Smiths? Never heard of them."

"They are clients of madame's."

"I see. Thought you were being introduced to relations, or something, of the fellow you brought home last night."

"No, *no*. Clients," Frankie repeated, feverishly emphatic. "They're giving a dinner and a girl has fallen out, that's all."

"If you see Sevening you might tell him from me that that football game—"

"But I'm not seeing Mr. Sevening," poor Frankie explained with a pang. "I'm *not!*"

"Oh, well, don't get so het up," called back her brother. "I suppose it's not outside the bounds of possibility that you might be seeing him?" Again the pang shot through Frankie. When would she see him? Suppose she never did see him? He was but a chance acquaintance; they had traveled together on a train. She might easily never see Mr. Sevening again. But her brother was still speaking.

"I say!" He was grave now. "Perhaps it's just as well you're not to be at home this evening, Frankie, really."

"Why? Has— George, has anything happened?"

"Well, in a way yes. Something has."

"Oh, George!" she called, agitated. "What's it about, George?"

"It's Great-aunt Anna. Dad was called away from the office. She's gone, poor old girl."

"Oh!" exclaimed Frankie, ashamed that she was half relieved. Great-aunt Anna, after all, was over ninety.

Her brother continued, "Yes; the best way of all for her. She hadn't been ill. Lawyers were there; she'd that moment signed some paper or other. Paper dropped from her hand and suddenly they found the old thing had gone, without a word. Mum's rather depressed," added George cheerfully, "but I'm looking after her. No sense in your being here, my dear. You couldn't do anything.

"The old lady always said nobody was to go into mourning for her. Well, have a good time. Good-by."

"That was about my mother's old aunt," explained Frankie, turning from the telephone without a suspicion of what that message was to mean to her, without a suspicion that it would bring any change in her life. "She was incredibly old, eccentric and frightfully rich."

"Oh, really," said Mrs. Bartlett-Smith. Then, with a kindly glance, "Does that mean, Miss Carter—" She hesitated, uncertain how to put it. "Will this mean, perhaps, that you won't have to go on working?"

"You mean because she may leave

money to my people?" took up the outspoken Frankie. "Oh, no fear. Nothing of that sort about Great-aunt Anna. She told us so candidly. Still, we'll all be sorry. One can't help feeling sorry," said this girl, who felt so electrically alive from her shining hair to her supple toes, "for *any one* who's dead!"

CHAPTER III

DINNER AT THE RITZ

HOW could she banish Robert Sevening from her thoughts? They lingered with him as she dressed, helped by Mrs. Bartlett-Smith's efficient maid; as she got into the big purring Rolls with her hostess. As they pulled up outside the Ritz—

"I feel like Cinderella's evening out," she told her hostess, pulling herself together to smile with all the party spirit she ought to have felt and did not. Was not the real Prince missing?

She put the finishing touches to herself in the cloak room. Her dress, chosen from the wardrobe of Mrs. Bartlett-Smith's daughter, was in startling contrast to the kit in which she had appeared up to now. It was long, frilly and feminine.

Frankie's slim body, usually dressed like a sword in a sheath, was to-night the stem to a many-petaled coralla of bouffant mauve tulle — transparent as morning mist, airy as bubbles about her. It was the kind of creation that has a name "Lilac Time"; it had to be worn with silver slippers, and a long, scintillating string of crystal.

"Ready, my dear?" asked her hostess. "I see two of my men are already waiting in the lounge." She put a finger on the girl's slim white arm, and lowered her voice. "That, with his back to us, is the one I want you to prattle away to and amuse."

"I'll do my best," said Frankie, hovering a step or so behind her hostess, who sailed forward to greet her guests. Then she turned to introduce them. "Mr. Van Eyden, Mr. Scott."

The millionaire whom Frankie had been requisitioned to entertain was, as she at once saw, completely unlike her preconceived notions of very rich men. She had been brought up on the legend (melancholy for the rich but encouraging to the poor) of the millionaire who, at a feast, can eat nothing but one digestive biscuit, drink nothing but half a glass of charged water; who is liverish, unhappy, and envious of any robust tramp on the road.

Nothing of this about Mr. Van Eyden! Few tramps could be more robust than this man from the open spaces who, although in faultless—which is to say usual—evening dress, had somehow the effect of still wearing riding breeches and a blue shirt open at the neck. That was figure. The face surmounting it was the large pink face that might have rested on a pram pillow; its eyes were the wide and bright blue eyes of the baby boy Mr. Van Eyden had been, he was clean-shaven, with a laughing mouth, and white teeth of which the two front ones were widely spaced. This further added to the "gigantic baby" look. The finishing baby touch, however, was the tufted hair above his brow: silky-white, one could so imagine it as silky-gold, twisted round the finger of his nurse, into a cockatoo crest!

As for the legendary gloom of the successful millionaire?—Not a trace was to be found. Instead of it, radiant delight—just that of a baby when

the sun is shining, and he is enjoying the movement of his carriage, the fine weather, passing objects of interest, his own big, colored balloon bobbing along with him.

He beamed at his hostess and at Frankie, of whom he took immediate possession. "I'm fond of girls, I am," he told her at once. "Very fond of pretty girls. That's a lovely frock you've got, just the kind of frock I like." He spoke with an attractive heartiness. "My daughter, who's in school in Paris, has a frock something like that. Only it's rose color, with a big shiny star. Yes, I have two daughters. Very pretty girls, too. No prettier than you, though," he added, with a loud, disarming laugh.

Frankie in her fine feathers, sipping the Martini which he had put into her hand, thought, "Is this what I've got to amuse? That won't be hard work. All one has to do is make an intelligent face—or even one's usual face, and listen while he enjoys life."

"Oh, yes, I do have a good time when I come to New York; I love coming back," he told her. "At the same time, you know, I love the Argentine. You'll have to visit it. You'll have to come and stay there with me—and my other daughter, of course. That 'll be all right. Oh, that's settled."

Another easy, disarming laugh. "We'll give you a marvelous time. You ride, of course? No? Oh, I'll enjoy teaching you. I love going round with pretty girls and showing them everything," declared the grown-up baby with zest.

The other man took his pleasures more sadly. He was a young lawyer, engaged in some business for Mr. Van Eyden, and hardly said anything throughout the evening, but gazed through his spectacles at the gayer throng.

"And here," exclaimed the hostess, "is Evangeline at last."

The third lady appeared. Just as dear, motherly Mrs. Bartlett-Smith was got up to represent a sumptuous siren, so the lady called Evangeline strove to represent a stage adventuress. She was all black, white and deep rose color. White—a lot of it liquid white—was the skin of face, neck, arms and back as far as the waist. Black was her sleeveless frock of dullest Crêpe de Chine, with its long, narrow train and its strap barring her back. Black was her sooty hair, growing in a widow's peak on her low brow. Black were her eyes and lashes as those of Shakespeare's lady. The three touches of rose-red about her were her made-up mouth, her rose-red varnished nails, her tiny, short-vamped, high-heeled shoes of rose-red Crêpe de Chine.

"Oh, what a lovely woman," exclaimed Mr. Van Eyden, his blue, baby eyes caught by this fresh apparition. "Oh, I do like to see a woman turn herself out as attractive as that. Very beautiful, isn't she? Who is she, do you know?"

"Yes, I do," said Frankie, laughing a little. The newcomer had not recognized Frankie, but she was another of Mme. Cytherea's clients. Many a time had Frankie entered, in her dim-green appointment book, dates for hair treatment for this lady. "That's Mrs. Evangeline Griggs."

"Mrs.? No, is she? Oh, I should have thought she was much too young," exclaimed Mr. Van Eyden, "to have such a thing as a husband?"

"Well, she hasn't got him now. She's a widow."

"Go on! Just fancy that lovely girl. Well, you do surprise me. Still, I'm

accustomed to widows. There's something very taking about them. There were eighty-one widow ladies on the boat when I came up. (Nothing I like better than a sea voyage, really.) Everybody on the boat called me 'Joe,' would you believe it?"

Frankie would.

For the first time that day forgetting her anguished thoughts, she was enjoying the enthusiasm of this millionaire almost as much as he enjoyed the whole of life. She remembered the verse:

> I wish I liked the human race.
> I wish I liked its silly face.
> I wish I liked its way of walking.
> I wish I liked its way of talking.
> And when I'm introduced to one
> I wish I thought "What Jolly Fun."

Mr. Joe Van Eyden did think so; he also went on saying so. He found everything "such jolly fun": the Ritz, this party, the cocktails, the band, the other people in the lounge, the prospect of theater and a dance, his meeting with this pretty young girl in lilac, his introduction to that spectacular widow lady in black, white, and rose-red. Mrs. Bartlett-Smith need not have worried that she could not keep him entertained.

"Will you take Miss Carter under your wing?" she smiled, as empty cocktail glasses were put down. It was only long, long afterward that little Frankie Carter, girl of the Cocktail Age, remembered that Martini which was to be the last she should ever taste. "Mr. Scott, you will sit by me at dinner. Evangeline, dear, I have invited a fascinating young man—I mean, of course, *another* fascinating young man—for you. I can't think what can have become of— Ah. Here he is!"

There made his way up to them, through the restaurant throng, the fourth man; in graceful haste and murmuring smiling apologies there entered Mr. Robert Sevening.

HAS it occurred to you to have every light in the house go suddenly *out?* Then, after a wait in pitchy darkness, something suddenly happens and once again every light is full on?

This was how it felt to Frankie Carter, when, at the end of a day spent in misery over a man taken to prison, she looked up to see him, free and in gay spirits, making his way toward her party.

Recognition brightened his face at sight of her, and as he turned from the elder ladies to Frankie, real pleasure sounded in his "Hello!"

"Oh, you *know* each other?" exclaimed their hostess. It is a trifle disconcerting when, having secured a girl for the purpose of making the evening go for one special man, it appears that quite another man lights up at her approach. "Well, we're all here. Shall we go in? More amusing, I thought, to dine where we can look at other people."

As they moved into the crowded restaurant, Mrs. Bartlett-Smith sailed close enough to Frankie's mauve ruffles to whisper: "You won't forget to let Mr. Van Eyden tell you all all about S. A.? (I mean South America, not sex appeal.) You'll *listen?*"

"But I want to *hear!*" retorted the beaming Frankie.

In a dream she found herself taking her place at this flowery table for six. Was this the Ritz? For her it was just the rosiest of backgrounds. A moving pattern—palms, frocks, faces, black shoulders, faces, white shoulders, more faces, flowers, glass, silver, palms. Just background, setting, for

the one human being who mattered. The surprise was not all on her side; for imagine young Sevening's astonishment to find Sunshine-Cure, whom he connected with the commuters' early train, here at a "special" party given by one of his richest acquaintances!

"Marvelous restaurant, this. I *am* enjoying myself. Aren't you?" (Needless to say whose voice this was in Frankie's ear.) "What's this? Caviare? Nothing I like better. You fond of it?"

"Very," from Frankie. "That is, I've never *tasted* it before—"

"What? Oh, isn't that delightful now? . . . Oh, I like the idea of a young girl who's never tasted caviare. What do you think of it, eh?"

"Delicious!" enthused Frankie. All the more so because she had been stabbed by dismay. For, heavens! *How* lovely Mr. Sevening's dinner partner looked on the other side of the table; what a symphony in ivory-white, sooty-black and coral-red! Could he *help* falling for that? But gayly Frankie chattered on; to her, caviare "looked like gray pearls and tasted like a mixture of the seaside and the rainbow!"

Sevening caught this. He caught her eye; he smiled. She was reassured. And not without justification, for, though he was put next to a woman considerably better-looking than Frankie, of faultless finish (interesting, too!), still, his real interest turned to that little friend of "the Up-train." When he had seen her last she had looked like a boy . . . Now here she was, like a lilac bush in full bloom! White-shouldered, smiling, tremulous! Amusing, the difference it made.

Naturally it made him impatient for the moment to speak to her, and she was living for that moment; but her eagerness, fortunately, seemed all drawn out by her table neighbors. Frankie was prettily greedy about the luscious food put before her, the bland ham *mousse* that melted in her mouth; the forced asparagus—"the size," she commented, "of telegraph poles chopped in two."

She heard a voice that sounded more or less like her own exclaiming at intervals: "Imagine! You've seen all those places? Yours must have been a most *interesting* life—" to Mr. Van Eyden, who had just come from a voyage round the world, but who, as Frankie realized, if he had never left the tamest country village, would have considered life equally exciting. Dimpling up at him, she suggested it was a matter of temperament?

"Rather! Oh, I *am* thankful I've got the sanguine temperament! The optimist's make-up, that's me. Do you know, I've known fellows travel all over Egypt, Italy, and Lordknows-whatika, and come back home saying everything was overrated. One of my pals promised my young daughter he'd write to her at every port, and all she got was a picture post card of the boat, saying: '*So* rough, Peggy, *so* cold. Why did I ever come?' Feel sorry for him, don't you?"

Frankie's "sorry" feelings were scarcely functioning.

Every other fiber of her was alive, excited, yet exasperated. Too much of this party—yet not enough! *When* would she hear Mr. Sevening's story? Before her eyes shifted a dazzle of faces. Only one she wished to watch, shut off, except for glimpses through carnations-and-fern!

On the other side of that flowery barricade, Sevening was meditating: "Last time that little thing saw me it was with the Hand of the Law descend-

ing on my shoulder . . . I expect you know Paris better than you know New York, Mrs. Griggs?"

FRANKIE opened her eyes and ears. Mrs. Evangeline Griggs, lovely, sophisticated, was holding forth on Primitive Woman.

"The mistake we make is in imagining that primitive woman was *passive*. Your Victorians consider that, if the 'Modern Girl' takes the initiative in Love, she acts '*unnaturally*, she goes *against fundamentals*, she is *contrary to all primitive feminine instincts*.' Now that is absurd."

Frankie, leaning white elbows on the table, gazed through the flowers. Little she guessed how this table talk was later to affect her Fate! But what a thrill to hear this brilliant creature discuss what she herself had argued about with her own family! For the moment she even forgot the Sevening mystery! Vivid, golden-headed inexperience—in Love, and the youngest at the table!—listened alertly to sophisticated Maturity quoting—

"Even in the earliest times, marriage by capture was *not* universal," went on Evangeline.

"Then what about our friend the famous old Caveman?" burst in the South American. The exquisite southerner vouchsafed him the slightest glance as she continued, while fellow guests listened:

"It was not always the custom for primitive man to stun his bride senseless and drag her off by the hair. There were other tribes; other manners."

She sipped tonic water, accustomed to pauses without interruption.

"We have records of very ancient tribes among whom a maiden sought her own mate, picking out the youth she found desirable. Then it was up to her to acquaint the young hunter with the fact."

"Now, think of that!" beamed Van Eyden. "Wonder which of us fellows here would have stood the best chance with the lovely savage?"

Mrs. Griggs caught Frankie's attentive glance and gave her a sympathetic, carmine-lipped smile. "To win the young man's approval was not all," pursued the soft voice. Her lashes, mascaraed black as the fringes of a Spanish shawl, swept her ivory cheeks as she glanced down at her parrot-pink, polished finger nails. "Difficulties were put in the way. The maiden was forced to smuggle her young man into the hut, or cave, or wherever it was—and there he had to be kept, undiscovered, for an entire night before the marriage was permitted by the tribe. I imagine some modern women revert to the one type, some to the other."

"Ha-ha! So now we know!" broke in the overseas guest. "Some of us fellows drag; others are dragged, eh? Now which d'you think you—"

There was a buzz of conversation as to which class each guest belonged; then coffee interrupted that discussion . . . Cigarettes . . . Kümmel, clear as the mountain brook, but tasting so unlike it . . . Mrs. Bartlett-Smith's plump, bediamonded small hand diving into evening bag for brocaded billfold; handing it to the young lawyer to settle up . . . silver tray . . . Smiles, bows, good evenings from waiters to party trooping out . . . Finis to the first stage of that magic evening—(*Dinner, at the Ritz, with him!*) But still no words exchanged with him . . . Taxi . . . Then glimpse of night sky above lights of Broadway. Walk of a few steps toward the theater entrance . . . And then, at

last! the moment when young Sevening, seeking the bright eyes of the youngest of the party, smiled—showing the creases in the cheek, the beautiful teeth—and murmured, "Didn't you wonder how I managed to break out of jail?"

IT is those who earn the daily bread who demand the nightly Circus!

To-night Frankie Carter, who, like most of the world's workers, was a show fan, found herself, for the first time, not absorbed in what was going on on the stage. For the first time in her life she watched a curtain rise while she thought of something else—Sevening's shoulder touching hers, as they sat side by side.

She said: "You *must* tell me what it's all about. What happened?"

"To me? Nothing. You see that I am no longer in durance vile, nor have I a warder at each hand. Plenty of time," he told her, liking to tease the eager, puzzled little thing. "Never mind my sinister affairs. I will explain later. But you tell me about yourself. This is an unexpected pleas—"

"Hush," remarked the usual people in the row behind.

So Frankie settled down to enjoying the play. Was she not sitting next the One Important Person?

One line impressed Frankie. The heroine, speaking of her husband having been posted to the Austrian capital, said she felt her child was "*the wrong age for Vienna—*"

"*No age is wrong for Vienna,*" took up the hero. "*It's the City of Enchantment.*"

And in the fifth row of the orchestra a girl in lilac tulle thrilled to the queer presentiment, "That line is going to come back to me some day. '*The City of Enchantment!*' Vienna . . . Why?"

"I'll be off there myself," murmured young Sevening to his hostess, "in another week."

"Off where, Bob?"

"Vienna. I—"

"Ssh!" said the usual somebody behind. On the stage the hero, taxed with "*being in love again,*" vowed: "*I'm always in love—with Beauty.*"

Frankie thought, "He can't be going *for ever?* Pooh! People go over on business and come back. Fate couldn't be shabby enough to take him right away?"

The play sped to the final curtain. Presently the ingénue was listening to her romantic lover's song—

> "Though my world has gone awry,
> Though with Time my tears may dry,
> I shall love you till I die.
> Good-by!"

"*What* a sensible song," thought little Frankie, swallowing the lump in her throat. As she sat there, all costly in borrowed plumes, small head shining like the brass knob on a bedpost, she looked a perky little modern blonde. She might have been cut out of gold foil and combined with white kid, mauve tulle, and paint, to make a doll for a telephone!

Underneath these trappings a passionate heart was thinking, just as any girl of the 'nineties, the 'sixties, or even the fifteenth century might have thought: "*Just* what one feels—'*I shall love you till I die!*'"

"*No idea beyond having a good time—and no good time without a great deal of money, much too much drink, and far too few but expensive clothes. Regular hard-boiled little modern girl,*" people say, a dozen times a day, of dozens of girls who look more or less as Frankie Carter looked that night. . . . What are they feeling,

what thinking? Does any one know? Least of all, probably, the critics who are saying "*Hard-boiled.*"

CHAPTER IV

THE "NAUGHTY" NIGHT CLUB

THEY were out in the street; they were packing themselves into two cars; fur rugs were drawn up about brocaded or silken knees. They were driving . . . Broadway's winking advertisements sparkled, now emerald, now ruby, now diamond . . . Frankie told herself: "Even if he *is* going away, I'm to have another dance with him first! We can talk while we're dancing."

It was half past eleven when the cars drew up at the narrow entrance above which glowed a rosy night light. Mrs. Bartlett-Smith signed in her guests. Presently a smiling waiter shepherded them to the best of the supper tables set around a pool of polished floor. Sevening asked Mrs. Griggs if she had been there before. Frankie was glad to hear her say it was her first visit; Frankie had never been taken to such an expensive-looking supper club as the Giant Night Light.

"What sort of place is it, really?"

"What shall I tell you?" asked the young man, with the teasing smile which bewitched little Frankie, but which the older woman found tiresome. "This is the sort of place which might be one thing—or another. All depends upon the sort of person you are, who go to it."

Here the room darkened into warm gloom striped by colored shafts of limelight; green to amber, amber to rose. A ray fell brilliantly across the silver bucket for champagne on the black glass of their table. A tall boy, dancing past, stooped to brush a swift kiss on his partner's shoulder. Frankie, thrilled, thought: "I hope they didn't know I *saw* that?" Dryly, Mrs. Griggs murmured, "Why, I can hear certain Puritans in this land of Prohibition calling this a Pagan scene."

Robert Sevening took up, "Look at these people! Filling their systems with drinks for which they're not thirsty, and food for which they aren't hungry," he went on, shaking his head in mock disapproval. "Ruining their digestions! Losing what's left of their waistlines. To say nothing of spoiling their keenness for the day's work tomorrow."

"Bob, you're impossible. Why, oh, why did I ask two croaking cynics to my party? What will our friend from South America think of—"

"Oh, don't you worry about *me.*" Her friend from South America gave his happiest laugh. "I've done nothing but enjoy myself . . . Fond of dancing? Why! It's my passion. D'you know, every night on that boat we danced until Lord knows what hour. Ladies were slipping out of their cabins in kimonos to find out what was happening to their daughters—or their mothers. Oh, they're going to play my favorite tune. 'I'm in love, so in love!' . . . Let's not miss this!" Springing up like a large jack-in-the-box, he drew his hostess on to the floor. He stepped, he circled lightly as any feather on the breeze, dancing as enthusiastically as he continued to talk. To this joyous grown-up child of a millionaire the Night Light would figure in the marvelous time he had had in the States. "Night life of New York, eh? A friend of mine threw a party at one of these wicked night clubs, just like what you read about. Six of us. There was a most

beautiful girl, a widow, and a lovely little blonde, as pretty as paint, all beautiful dancers. Oh, the time we had!"

True enough, what a place is varies with the people at it.

To Frankie, of course, the club was a dancing place in the Land of Heart's Desire. This was the girl who had wise-cracked to her mother: *"As a generation we run on gasoline, not emotions."* The place for her was lighted with emotion, hung with emotion, polished with it.

Sevening had the first dance with Mrs. Griggs, then took his hostess from Van Eyden. With the first bar of the first waltz he was on his feet, turning upon Frankie the smiling look that says "Ours."

Her small gold head was only on a level with his shoulder, but her step followed his as smoothly as the petal, fallen into the stream, is swirled by the eddy.

Softly the orchestra played the gypsy tune out of the play they had just seen.

"As I began saying in the theater, this is an unexpected pleasure. I didn't know you were a friend of the Bartlett-Smiths?"

"Only in business," explained Frankie. "But you were going to tell me, Mr. Sevening—"

"What about it?"

"Oh, don't be so maddening! You know!"

"Ah, yes, about my getting out of jail."

He looked at her with enormous gravity. "But of course. Here I am."

"You didn't have to break prison, or whatever it's called, to get here?"

"That's a long story," he said with serious eyes, but with a flicker at the corners of his mouth. "A long, sad story."

"You look sad," scoffed Frankie, irritated yet intrigued. "What *did* happen?"

"I'll tell you. Only not now. Talk about cells and whitewash and disinfectants and police notebooks in a scene of rosy revelry like this? Not the time and place, do you think?"

"Yes, because I want to know!"

He laughed. "Besides, it spoils dancing to talk . . . Also, I want *you* to tell me things."

"Spoils dancing to talk."

"Very good, miss."

In silence he guided her; in silence they circled and stepped.

TOO soon the waltz ended. Again they sought their black-glassed table. Supper. Buzz of conversation. Again the bright bubbles prickled against Frankie's lips — how should she know that this was to be her last taste of champagne?

Then they were dancing again.

"Look here, Miss—no. I can't remember not to call you Frankie."

"Why should you?"

Oh, perhaps by calling her Frankie he meant that they were special friends—more than friends!

She radiated happiness.

"About that farce of my arrest this morning—"

"You're going to tell me?"

"Well, I owe it to you to explain that you're not treading a measure with an escaped convict, nor even a ticket-of-leave man."

"Oh. A mistake—" She suddenly felt that the arrest story did not matter. Something else did.

"I owe it to you to tell you you're treading a measure with some one who's only here as—well, an extra."

"You don't say so? What's the mystery?"

Lack of honesty was scarcely little Frankie's failing.

"I never set eyes on her until this afternoon, when she floated into the showroom and told *madame* she wanted somebody at her dinner to amuse a man."

"Need you have *told* me you were talking prettily to me and dancing with me, to order?"

"You?" Frankie laughed up at him.

"Oh, I was supposed to amuse Mr. Van Eyden."

"You obviously succeeded."

"Could one miss it? Well, it was what I was brought here to do. Anyhow, he's asked me out there."

It's rather hard on a hostess when the girl she has invited to entertain one man lights up at sight of quite another one

"Out where?"

"To his lovely home in the Argentine, to stay with him and his daughter. They'd teach me to ride and everything. I wonder if he meant it?"

"Naturally he did." Sevening glanced over his broad shoulder and between the heads of other couples at the flaming head of the millionaire. "Those people are enormously hospit-

able. You'll have a perfectly wonderful time."

"If I could go. Absolutely impossible for a pauper who would never have come to a place like this, even, except a kind of job!"

"You told our genial friend that?"

"When could I get a word in? Shall I try to explain next time?"

"No, don't," said young Sevening quickly. He found her touching, as well as extraordinarily attractive. When had he met a girl who combined such crisp modern looks with such freshness? A girl he liked so much? Not for a thundering long time. That was his mood; a dangerous one. It has a way of melting, this masculine mood, into one of precise and definite impulse. It also has a way of not melting. The mistake that almost any girl makes sooner or later is to overestimate the mood. The man himself never overestimates it. He allows for it. He says: "*Yes. That's that. I could be most taken by this little thing. But!*" Robert Sevening, for instance, had definitely decided how many years and how much work still loomed between himself and the idea of what he called Anything Serious.

How should Frankie guess that? She only knew that as the room grew warmer and noisier, the orchestra pepped up, the rest of the party settled into twos, so the voice of the Charmer sounded more friendly. With every step she danced there grew and grew the feminine Mistake that is born of fervent wishing. Surely he must . . .

Oh, wonderful party that had shown her this chance! So wonderful that a queer thought came to her. She would be glad— Yes, glad when she was alone, able at last to think it quietly over, to brood upon every colorful moment, every look, every word, every tone! There could, she thought, be nothing more wonderful—

The something more wonderful came.

"About later, Frankie. I've got my car—"

"Have you?" This surprised her. She did not know why she had put the young man down as not well enough off even to run his own Ford.

"Yes, and in about half an hour I'm driving home. Do come with me, won't you?"

FRANKIE, deep in the springy bed allotted to her by Mrs. Bartlett-Smith, found herself too excited to sleep at once, too stimulated by memories of that moment when Robert Sevening had asked—as if it were nothing! if he might drive her home.

In no more time than she took to say: "Thanks frightfully, but I'm afraid not—" Frankie felt she *had* let the man drive her home. Speeding along cleared roads under the magic of night . . . Stars . . . Dance of moths in radiance from headlights . . . Quavering call of some night bird . . . *Robert Sevening's hands on the wheel; Frankie, close against his shoulder!* . . . Was there anything in the world she would so have adored?

"But I didn't *say* so." She preened her little face against the pillow, remembering. "Just explained how I wasn't going home after the party, and about my clothes being here."

"This isn't even my own dress," Frankie had announced, as usual open as her name. "These fine feathers" (a glance, down bud-like bodice and long tulle skirts, to the silver slippers), "belong to Mrs. Bartlett-Smith's girl."

"You oughtn't to have to wear her frock," Sevening said, so brusquely that Frankie raised her thread-thin

eyebrows. The music had stopped, the groups half separated. She and Sevening stood in a corner, lightly clapping for an encore of "*Baby, You've Got the Right Idea,*" as he exclaimed—wasn't it adorable of him?—"You ought to have all the frocks that you want, of your own!"

Frankie's heart sang.

Philosophically she had chirped: "Come to that, so ought any nice girl. Fun, though, wearing this, even for an evening!"

"M'm— It suits you. But no better than your own get-up."

"I'll love my office clothes now," thought Frankie.

Upliftèd, she had ragged him—"By the way, *are* those your dress things?"

"Rather; *I'm* not a good enough dancer to be asked out for the evening in a borrowed suit."

Frankie, who had been trained by Dad and George to know the difference between Good and Evil in men's clothes, understood that Sevening's were exactly *right.*

She thought: "He wouldn't have teased me like that unless he really specially *liked* me."

She said: "Ah, *you're* used to associating with millionaires?"

"I? Er— Yes. Have to, whenever I can—for business purposes. But '*who drives fat oxen need not himself be fat.*'"

"You mean you're not a millionaire yourself?"

To this he said, watching her face: "Are you going to like me less because I'm not?"

"I never thought you were one. No."

"A Tired Business Man, that's me," he said resignedly, as they began to dance again. "Just the usual Daily Breader. Like yourself. D'you see?"

"Yes." Over Sevening's shoulder Frankie caught the blue eyes of Mr. Van Eyden, at whom she smiled. He was fun, he was kind, but yes! his millions *did* make him—different. Whether it was because of the lovely home in the Argentine, or the voyages round the world, or the diamonds or the millions, he seemed different. Mr. Sevening, however, had always seemed the same as herself—her people, just commuters.

"He *likes* me," Frankie told the pillow. "He was sorry he had to drive home without me. He's nearly there by now, I suppose."

As she dropped to sleep she remembered Mr. Sevening's "After I come back from Europe you'll let me ring you up and go out with me, will you, Frankie?"

That was what had set her thoughts galloping ahead.

Already, it was weeks from now. Sevening had been abroad and come back. He had rung her up. They had made a date for their first dinner and dance alone. Other dinners followed. And drives in Sevening's car.

Poor Frankie! She would have been so sensible had it been any other man. She would have shrugged her shoulders and laughed at any friend of George's, or any other commuter who spoke to her on the train. But because it was Robert Sevening she believed the summer of her life had come.

MEANWHILE the man who represented to Frankie all-Romance was talking, through clouds of smoke, to a friend with whom he was spending the night. (He had not driven home, after all.) "There's a new generation of girls," he said, "but you don't see one who isn't powdered. You hardly see one

who doesn't make-up her mouth. They all rub some sort of cream into their faces when they go to bed; most of them use some sort of skin tonic. This ought to be an age of pretty women."

"Well, but is it?" said the other, and poured another drink.

"Oh, yes. You don't see girls with spots now, girls with pale lips, girls with blackheads between their shoulder blades in evening dress."

"Well, perhaps you've helped to do them in, Robert."

"Yes, making women beautiful pays. It's amazing the way there's gone up in a dozen years the manufacture of face creams, liquid white, lotions, cleansing creams, powders, rouges, beauty preparations of every variety. Everybody uses them; from chorus to rectory, everybody! Well, if they've got to use somebody's eye-brightener, and that, why shouldn't they use mine? I see that they do, too."

"Yes, I'm glad you do," grunted Eric, the friend. He knew that Robert never appeared in his own shops. He knew, too, that with the proceeds of Cytherea's and other little gold mines he was generous to all sorts of charities in various countries: thumping subscriptions came from him to holiday homes, open-air and sunshine schools. He had given swimming baths to towns. A gymnasium was called after him.

"And where you're specially lucky," Eric remarked, "is that already you're financially secure enough to get married."

"Married? Me?" retorted Robert Sevening, outraged. "I don't mean to think of marriage for ten years at least. Don't be absurd!"

And at that moment Frankie was smiling in her sleep, dreaming she had said "Yes!" to a much more important question than one about dining and dancing.

CHAPTER V

THE WINDFALL

NEXT morning, after the exquisite tray breakfast which was brought to her bed at Mrs. Bartlett-Smith's, Frankie, once more crisply tailored, was, for the first time in her life, driven to business in a purring Rolls-Royce. Smoothly it took her through the stream of Daily Breaders and drew up at the entrance above which swung the painted sign for Cytherea's. The big commissionaire at the door opened his eyes to behold, skipping out of the opulent car the terse, busy little everyday figure.

Last night's glory lingered still in Frankie's eyes as she ran upstairs, into that hothouse atmosphere of perfume, cosmetics, shampooing and curling irons, as she took off her outdoor things, sat down at her dim green table and opened the dim green appointment book. The morning passed as if there had been no night before.

At one fifteen, her usual hour, Frankie slipped out to lunch at her usual haunt, but how could anything seem usual when last night still transfigured her world?

Fifth Avenue, yesterday charmless, was to-day the street of Romance.

In that uplifted mood, feeling that after Sevening's last words last night anything might be expected to happen, Frankie went back to Cytherea's—and, actually, something did happen. Frankie, busy over matching up a sample of ocher powder, was conscious that *madame* had come in from lunch with a little rush of fresh air and laughter and other people. Footsteps,

laughter, unfamiliar voices passed behind her back, died away in the upper regions. Then, with a whistle from the speaking tube, Miss Carter was asked to come upstairs.

Frankie found *madame* had with her a legal-looking gentleman of about fifty, Mrs. Evangeline Griggs, all in softest cloud-gray, with a spray of mauve orchids fastened to the collar of her chinchilla coat, and an elder lady. The elder lady was brightly hennaed. Her make-up, clothes, and emphatic little Paris hat gave an impression of terrific expenditure of money, time and effort. Frankie felt a little tired as she looked at her.

"This is Miss Carter, Madame Griggs."

The elder lady, in a soft voice that somehow did not go with her well-preserved exterior, asked: "Did Miss Carter know she'd been such a success last night?"

"I?" The absurd Frankie blushed up to where her pale gold hair began to grow on her white forehead, wondering if Mr. Sevening himself had said—Apparently this had nothing to do with Mr. Sevening, but with the lady they called Madame Griggs, mother-in-law of the beautiful Evangeline. "Miss Carter, my daughter has been telling me you're just the girl I've been looking for. Youth around me is what I have to have. I'm going abroad, in three days' time, for a few weeks. I want to know if I can count on you to come with me?"

Frankie turned to her boss. Cytherea smiled all over the comely pink face so set-off by the silvering shingle. "Miss Carter, Mme. Griggs and her daughter are going to make this worth while, both to you and me. I can't stand in your way!"

"So kind," murmured the girl, though, truth to tell, she was not carried off her feet by this Abroad idea. She wasn't particularly eager to go, but for one thing. *He would be away too.* New York was to lose the World's Wonder for a while; Paris might be the best thing, to fill the gap.

At least she *said* all the right things.

"Then that's settled," said Mme. Griggs. "I have your telephone number, Honey." She smiled at the young girl to whom she had taken a cordial liking. "I'll ring you up about traveling arrangements—"

Evangeline added, "Now we must be off, mamma. Come along! Not a moment—"

"It's only when I'm with people like that," Mme. Cytherea said, drawing a deep breath, "that I realize in what a trance most of us spend our lives. You're in luck, Miss Carter, to be taken up by Mme. Griggs. She must be nearer seventy than sixty—yet she's going to risk rejuvenation treatment!"

"Is *that* what she's going to have?"

"There's such a mystery made about it that I fancy that's it. Or a face lift. Or both. All *you'll* have to do is to pack. You won't want any clothes but what you've got. If you do—I know you're no gold digger, but the merest hint and Mme. Griggs will buy you anything you need in Vienna."

Frankie looked up. "Vienna? *Did* you say *Vienna?*"

"I did. Europe's loveliest capital. Do you want to go there?"

"Do I? *'The City of Enchantment,'*" murmured Frankie, dazedly quoting the not-to-be-forgotten line. "*'No age is wrong for Vienna.'*"

"I'm sure you'll find yours is just right. I rather took it for granted that you'd go."

"Oh, I'll *go.*" Frankie never paused to remind herself that the Austrian

capital is a large city, that its hotels are full of travelers that she, Frankie, would be kept busy by her duty toward Mme. Griggs, and that it was far from certain that she would run across Mr. Robert Sevening. "I'll go."

"Your people will think it's all right?"

"That," retorted the youngest Miss Carter, "is the news I'm breaking to *them!*"

THAT evening, Frankie reached home to find her family, who usually took her return very much for granted, all on the look-out.

As she came down the street Sonny was calling to her, "Hi! step on it." At the gate waited her sister Win, agog, flushed, sparkling-eyed, as she had been on the day of her engagement. "Frankie at last! Thought you were *never* coming! Hurry in! News."

"Where's the fire? Has there been a wreck?" Frankie retorted. "Who sent theater tickets?" Gayly full of her own news, she swung into the house.

Inside the cramped hall her mother's voice exclaimed excitedly, "Oh, darling, aren't you *late?* Just on the day *this* happens—"

"Happens? Has anything happened? Here?"

"I should think it had! Frankie, dear. Your father's got something to tell you!"

For a moment Frankie's heart seemed to stop, and she had not even breath to ask, "Something about Mr. Sevening?"

Before she could speak, her father called, "Frankie home? Good!"

He came out of his own small den.

"Come in here, will you, Frankie!"

Frankie, Mum, George, Win, Sonny and the two dogs all crowded into the small room. Mr. Carter cleared his throat and began:

"I say, dear, this is about your great-aunt."

Frankie's tense excitement dropped.

"I know, dad. George told me over the telephone, last night."

"Yes, but not what her lawyers told me over the telephone this morning." His smile flickered as he said, "You see in me, Frankie, your trustee."

"My what, dad darling?"

"Trustee, Frankie. Your father is your trustee," importantly from Mum. The rest of the family repeated "Trustee" as if they imagined their sister had suddenly become deaf.

"Dad, what do you mean, exactly?"

"I'm your trustee, my dear child, for a year. It seems your poor Aunt Anna left you—quite a handsome legacy."

"What?"

"Left you money, Frankie!"

"Money? Me? Me? Money?"

"Yes. You knew your aunt had money, Frankie—"

"Yes, hairpin factory and investments." Frankie had not yet taken this in. "Dad, wasn't all that to go to Societies for Crushing Alcoholics, and all that?"

"The bulk of it's gone there. Only, there's a codicil. You know what that means, Frankie?"

"Yes, yes, a postscript. They say it's the most important thing in a woman's letter!"

"It's the most important thing in this woman's will for us. She left to her 'dear great-niece, Francesca Carter—'"

"Her *dear* great-niece," Mum murmured, touched. "She liked you, darling!"

"She left to her dear great-niece,

Francesca Carter, the whole of certain investments. It tots up to thirty or forty thousand. What do you say to that?"

Frankie could say nothing at all.

Dad went on. "Very decent of the old lady. Handsome of her, I call it."

"Aunt Anna left me all that?"

"Haven't you taken it in? Slow at the uptake to-day?"

"George darling, we heard first; we've had hours to get used—"

"Frankie, at first it didn't seem real!"

For imagine this family: sturdily and cheerfully hard-up, they had always been forced to look, if not at every dime, certainly at every dollar of their budget. They were just half a dozen of the pluckily struggling class, the taxpaying class with its perilously narrow margin. One of them had become an heiress. Yes, little Frankie, the receptionist—still in that business-kit, the neat felt hat she had bought second-hand from another girl, a crisp tailor-made from which she had half a dozen times ripped cleaners' tapes, near-python shoes that had been twice soled and heeled. Little Frankie had inherited thousands.

"I—I think," said the business girl, "it would seem more real if you told me how much this would be a week?"

"Roughly," said her father, "it means forty a week."

"Gosh," breathed Frankie crudely, fervently. "Don't wake me, anybody!"

Her father's hand fell fondly on the shoulder under the tweed coat. He saw that windfall as security for a time ahead, when cruel years should have left frost on that sunbeam-gold head, should have bent those straight, slim shoulders, should have clouded some of the radiance which, for him, his younger daughter never failed to spread about her.

"I'm thankful enough," he said soberly, "that you've got this."

"Forty dollars a week?" whispered Frankie, staring unseeingly from one bright, familiar face to another.

"Double what I've been earning at Cytherea's. Forty dollars for *doing nothing?*"

"Oh, but you haven't told her! We'd forgotten that," Mrs. Carter chimed in. "She doesn't *know?* You tell her, John."

"By Jove, yes. Frankie, it's only on one condition that you touch a penny of this money."

"A condition, dad?" A swift alarming thought came to the new-made heiress.

"Dad, what's the condition? *Mustn't I ever get married?*"

"A girl who looks like you can get whatever she wants," he told her

Holliday Hearts

The Romances of the Holliday Family — Romance Two

NEVER MIND, NANCY

By ETHEL DONOHER

IT was possible for Nancy Holliday to pound her typewriter with mechanical skill and at the same time think steadily about Keith Pennington.

"In reply to your letter of the fourteenth," she typed, while her thoughts ran like this: "Keith's so different from other men, such a man of the world. He's traveled everywhere, and actually lived abroad two years. Oh, he's wonderful! But there's no use thinking so much about him. What if he does take me to lunch sometimes? What if he does stop at my desk and—and look at me as though he liked me? That doesn't mean anything. He likes lots of girls, and when he marries he'll choose some one from his own world.

"But just suppose," she continued, "he should fall in love with a poor girl—me, for instance. Oh, just suppose he *should!*"

Keith Pennington's fiancée! Nancy saw herself with a blazing diamond on her left hand, showing it to the girls in the office, listening to their exclamations of amazement, noting the awe and envy in their eyes.

"But I wouldn't high-hat them,"

Go gle

Nancy mused virtuously: "I'd treat them just the same as I do now. And I'd try to make them understand I felt very humble and unworthy of my great good fortune."

So, having disposed temporarily of her triumph over the office force, Nancy began to picture what they would say at home.

How proud and pleased her mother would be to learn that her daughter was soon to marry the son of her boss, the handsome, sophisticated, high-born Keith Pennington, the youngest member of his father's well-established firm!

And what, Nancy wondered, would her sister Theo say? Theo, who had just been married, and who acted as though nobody ever had been married before or ever could be again! There was her brother Peter, too. Wouldn't *he* be surprised? It took an awful lot to surprise Peter, but Nancy felt confident that Keith's engagement ring upon her finger would open his eyes.

Then there was Sunny, who was still in school. Sunny would be positively goggle-eyed at sight of that great pear-shaped diamond.

Also—and here Nancy felt a swift tinge of compunction—there was Colin. She would have to tell him about her engagement. And Colin would be hurt—oh, he would be terribly hurt!

Still, Nancy reasoned, she couldn't help that. She had told Colin over and over again that nothing would induce her to marry a man who had once, when they were children, given her the mumps. For where, in the name of all that was reasonable, would there be any romance in a marriage of *that* sort? But a marriage with Keith—oh, that would bring winged-romance down from the blue to carry her off through rose-colored clouds to—

The door leading to Keith's private office opened. Nancy felt her cheeks flush and her fingers fumble the typewriter keys; but she bent diligently above her work and appeared unaware of the light, brisk footsteps which were approaching her desk. Then:

"Would I be committing a crime if I interrupted that frantic industry for a few minutes?" a masculine voice inquired.

There was a hint of amusement in that voice. Nancy's flush deepened. She glanced swiftly up.

"Oh, Mr. Pennington! You—you startled me."

"I'm sorry," Keith returned, seating himself on one corner of her desk and regarding her with appreciative gray eyes. "But I thought," he added, "you'd agreed to stop calling me Mr. Pennington."

"Oh, but not—not in the office!"

"And why not in the office, when we're alone?" he wanted to know. "What difference does it make where we are?"

Nancy said nothing to that. She only smiled. And when Nancy smiled nobody ever wanted her to do anything else.

"I know what you've been reminding me of all this time," Keith decided suddenly. "You're like a wild rose. Yes, that's what you're like."

Partly to hide her delight, Nancy grimaced.

"A wild rose!" she scoffed. "How—countrified! Usually, I presume, you compare girls to orchids."

"Indeed I don't," he answered promptly. "I don't take the trouble. According to my sister, I'm the most tactless man on earth. But, even so, I know better than to let you get away with that 'countrified' stuff. What a term to apply to yourself! Why,

you're one of the best-dressed girls I've ever seen. Everything you wear seems exactly right."

NANCY laughed outright.

"And you tell me your sister calls you tactless!" she said. "Keith Pennington, you know very well that my clothes are makeshifts compared with hers. Now she really knows how to dress. I saw a picture of her in 'Vanities' the other day. She was wearing a velvet evening frock — oh, a wonderful one! Then you talk about my clothes—and at the same time you call me a wild rose. Not so good."

"You don't understand," Keith observed. "Nobody wants a wild rose to look like an orchid, you know."

"But," said Nancy decisively, "whether you know it or not, *I* want to look like an orchid. I'd like to have whole roomfuls of gorgeous, exotic clothes — orchid-like things, all of them."

"Perhaps you may have them one of these days." Keith looked directly into her eyes as he spoke; but Nancy sensed that his words and voice promised everything or nothing.

What, she wondered breathlessly, did he mean?

"Any girl who looks like you shouldn't find it difficult to get what she wants," he continued. "With that tawny hair, that rose and white skin, those gentian-blue eyes—"

"And those turned up nose," Nancy concluded in a flippant attempt to conceal the elation his praise brought her.

Keith smiled, then, and remarked lazily, "Funny, sweet little thing, aren't you? But if I'm going to do any work to-day I must say what I came out to say and get back to my office."

Nancy turned a blue-eyed hopeful glance upon him. "And what did you come out to say?"

"I was going to tell you I'm driving out to Cranford to-night to see a man on business, and thought I might stop and see you for a few minutes. Shall you be home?"

"I—why—oh, yes," she managed to articulate. "W-what time would you come?"

"I must be in Cranford at eight, and later to-night I'm leaving for Chicago, so that won't give me much time. How about seven o'clock? It's an unearthly hour, but—"

"Oh, that will be all right," Nancy heard herself assure him. "Why can't you have your dinner with us? We always have dinner at seven."

Keith looked surprised.

"Why, yes—I'd like to," he said rather vaguely. "Thanks a lot."

"All right, then," she responded, "we'll expect you for dinner. You can easily get to Cranford from Roselle Park by eight o'clock."

Keith went back into his office, and Nancy was left alone again with her thoughts. Startled, disturbing thoughts they were, now:

Oh, why on earth had she ever asked him to dinner? What had possessed her to do such a thing?

In the first place, what would he think of her asking him? He must feel she was trying to force him into intimacy with her family. And in the second place, how did she know there'd be anything suitable for dinner to-night? How did she know that either of the best tablecloths was clean? Oh, she had placed herself in a hazardous, a hideous position!

There was only one ray of comfort; this was Saturday. She would have a half day off, and there would be time,

if the worst came to the worst, to induce the whole family to help her prepare for Keith's coming.

And two hours later, seated in the comfortable old living room with her mother, her two sisters, and her brother Peter, Nancy felt that the worst had certainly become solidified.

"But why," Sarah Holliday inquired placidly as she glanced up from her sewing, "should there be any great preparations for this Keith Pennington, or whatever his name is?"

"Oh, mother"—Nancy tried hard not to sound impatient—"you don't *understand*. He—he's *Keith Pennington*, the son of my boss, and he lives in a regular palace out on Long Island. His sister is one of the most popular débutantes. They—well, they're used to having everything in the world—"

"But the sister isn't coming for dinner, too," Mrs. Holliday pointed out, "so you needn't worry about the tablecloth. No man pays any attention to the quality of damask, if it's clean."

"What are we going to have for dinner?" Nancy asked—and then held her breath.

"Well," said Mrs. Holliday, "we're going to have a nice lamb stew."

Theo, Sarah Holliday's married daughter, said afterward that at this information Nancy turned slightly green.

"A—a *lamb stew!*" she faltered. "Oh, *mother*, we couldn't *possibly* give him *that!*"

"I should say not!" said Peter, and over his newspaper his blue eyes twinkled at his sister. "When we have such an illustrious guy as Keith Pennington come to visit us we've got to have something suitable for dinner. Suppose you can that lamb stew, mother, and cook some nice Hamburg steak and fried onions?"

Sunny, baby of the family, giggled with delight. But Mrs. Holliday spoke soothingly to Nancy.

"We'll have whatever you'd like for dinner, dear. Plan it yourself."

"But, my gracious," Sunny protested, "I don't see why we must make such a fuss over this Pennington man. Are you crazy about him, Nan? But, of course you must be—"

"I am *not!*" Nancy cried furiously. "Just because he's coming to dinner and I want things halfway decent—"

"Never mind, honey," Theo soothed her. "We know you aren't in love with anybody but Colin."

"Oh"—Nancy's blue eyes flashed fire, now—"why will you all persist in thinking I'm bound to Colin? I tell you, I'm not in love with anybody, and as for Colin Hunt, he's the last man on earth I'd ever marry; so just understand me—" Nancy paused, struck by the expressions of the faces. Theo looked embarrassed, and Sunny was trying to make a warning signal. What was wrong with them?

Something drew Nancy's eyes toward the doorway, and there, regarding her silently, earnestly, stood Colin Hunt.

A WAVE of dismay swept over Nancy. Colin was such a dear. She loved him almost as much as she loved Peter. And now she had hurt him horribly. For of course it was one thing for a man to hear, directly from a girl, that she couldn't marry him, and quite another thing for him to hear her tell it to a lot of other people.

Peter was the first to speak.

"Hello," he said with true masculine disregard for the charged atmosphere. "Come in. We're holding a family powwow. It seems that the

house must be papered, painted, and refurnished before seven o'clock to-night, and a twelve course dinner must be planned and served upon our Sunday tablecloth. We are about to entertain a Guest with a capital G. He is first cousin to Hoover, second cousin to Lindbergh, and third cousin to the Prince of Wales. But—now get this straight — Nancy is *not* in love with him."

"You're too ridiculous, Peter!" Nancy exclaimed, her cheeks flaming. "Don't pay any attention to him, Colin. What he means is that Keith Pennington is coming to dinner to-night and, naturally, I want to have things nice."

Colin crossed the room and stood looking down at her with a strange, twisted smile on his lips. He was not handsome, perhaps, but his features were oddly attractive and his eyes would never have passed unnoticed. They were large and brown, and, just at the moment, very sober.

"Have you forgotten," he asked, "that you promised to go out to dinner and the movies with me to-night?"

Nancy was instantly contrite.

"Oh, I had forgotten!" she confessed. "But I could still go to the movies with you, Colin, for Keith can't stay. He must be in Cranford at eight o'clock."

"No," said Colin quietly, "never mind. We—we'll go some other time."

"Well"—Nancy elevated her eyebrows—"just as you like, of course."

"Aren't you singing to-night, Colin?" Mrs. Holliday inquired placidly.

"I'm singing this afternoon," he told her.

"On the same station?" Theo asked. "We always want to hear you. It still seems odd that we should know such a celebrity as you, Colin."

"Celebrity!" he scoffed. "I'm only an average singer who happened to go over on the radio. It's all chance."

"Indeed it isn't!" Sunny flew loyally to his defense. "Marjorie Shaw was saying the other day that you're the most talked of man in this part of the country. She said that every girl she knows is speculating how to meet you."

"Well," said Colin dryly, "if they aren't looking forward to a disappointment, they had better go on speculating."

"Oh, but you wouldn't disappoint them," Sunny protested. "Just because Nancy hasn't sense enough to appreciate you—"

A diversion was created then by the entrance of Marjorie Shaw. She was a slim, pretty girl who adored Peter Holliday, and who firmly believed that no one suspected it. Also she was Nancy's best friend. And of this fact Nancy took instant advantage.

"Come upstairs with me, won't you, Marge?" she asked. "I want to talk to you—"

"Yes," Peter interposed, "she wants to borrow your cut glass dodangles to use on the dinner table to-night, Marge."

Marjorie smiled at Peter with a special smile reserved only for him.

"But nobody uses cut glass any more," she explained.

"Don't they?" said Peter in horrified tones. "And there I was suggesting we should use it to-night! To-night of all nights! My good gracious Heaven!"

"What does he mean?" Marjorie inquired.

"He hasn't any sense; don't listen to him," Nancy loftily advised. "Come on upstairs with me, Marjorie."

The two girls went up to Nancy's

room, then, and it soon developed that Peter's prophecy had not been so far out of the way. Nancy did not want to borrow cut glass from Marjorie, but she did want to borrow a number of other things. And Marjorie was eager to help. She went back home at once to collect the things required.

FOR the rest of the afternoon the Hollidays had plenty to do. Peter had gone out with Colin, but Theo remained to assist in beautifying the living room and preparing a suitable dinner for Keith Pennington. Nancy worked like a small Trojan. There was only one servant in the Holliday ménage, and she was by no means a sensational cook. But Nancy could cook, and she was determined her mother should not overwork.

"What do you make of it, mother?" Theo asked when at last everything was ready. "Nancy, of all people, breaking her neck like this to impress a man! I can't get over it. She's always been so popular with men."

"That's just why it doesn't occur to her to conceal her efforts to impress this one," said Sarah Holliday. "If Nancy hadn't been so popular all her life she'd feel more self-conscious about letting us see how eager she is to have things just right for Mr. Pennington."

"Yes, I suppose you're right. But, oh, mother, if she should get hurt! Little Nan! I couldn't bear it. She's always been so happy. And now that I'm married to John and am so happy myself, I want just the same thing for Nan and Sunny."

Sarah Holliday sighed. She was a large woman, with a serene brow and wise, kindly eyes that had once been as blue as Nancy's.

"I've always hoped," she confessed, "that Nan would marry Colin. Still, I want her to have the man of her choice. It's all very difficult, though. If only your father had lived he might have been better able than I am to cope with these situations."

"Nobody could have brought us up better than you have, mother," Theo said warmly. "And I don't blame you for wishing that Nan would marry Colin. So far as I'm concerned, I don't know what more she wants. He's such a dear, has a good job in the bank, and, besides all that, he's a famous singer now. But, of course, you're right: Nan must marry the man she loves, whoever he is."

They heard the front door slam, and a minute later Peter and Colin came in.

"I left an envelope here with some papers in it," the latter explained; "so I stopped in to get it."

"Nancy put it in that table drawer over there," Theo told him, just as Nancy herself, with flushed cheeks and bright eyes, ran into the room. She was followed more leisurely by Marjorie.

"Everything's ready," Nancy announced. "I must run upstairs now and dress. Oh, hello, Colin—and, Peter, listen to me a minute: you've got to make cocktails before dinner, and, with those cocktails, we're going to serve caviare on crackers and olives with dried beef wrapped around them, pierced with toothpicks—to hold the dried beef on the olives, you know. But *don't*, when you see those things coming in with the cocktails, say, 'What's all this?' or anything of that sort. Don't say *one word* that could make Keith think we don't have things like that every night. And there's one thing more: I want these logs lighted in the fireplace. But, no matter *how*

warm you get, *don't take off your coat. Please* don't. Now remember."

"My gosh—" Peter was beginning when the telephone bell rang.

He stopped the car and drew her almost roughly into his arms

Nancy darted across the room to answer it.

"Yes?" they heard her say. "Yes, this is Nancy . . . Oh, hello, Keith!"

There was a slight pause; then, "Oh—why, yes—yes, of course I understand. It's—it's perfectly all right . . . Yes, I'll see you when you get back. I hope you have a wonderful trip and — and all sorts of luck. Good-by."

IT seemed to the others that Nancy was a tremendously long time replacing the receiver on its hook. No one spoke or stirred, and yet the silence that had fallen upon the room was acutely difficult to endure. When at last the girl turned to them, Sarah Holliday wanted to gather her up in her arms and rock her as she had rocked her as a child. It was as though a blight had passed across Nancy's face, killing all its joy and brightness.

"He — Keith can't come," she explained carefully. "It—it isn't necessary for him to see that man in Cranford; so—of course it would be foolish for him to come 'way out here for dinner when he is leaving to-night for Chicago."

"Of course," Marjorie flew to her assistance. "Of course," she repeated, "if he's going to Chicago to-night he'll have to pack and — and do all sorts of things. It would be ridiculous for him to come 'way out here just for dinner. *No* man would do that. But I—I'll bet he's awfully disappointed."

"Oh," said Theo, even more desir-

ous than Marjorie to pour balm upon the wounds in Nancy's breast, "I'll bet he's *fearfully* disappointed. But of course he simply couldn't come 'way out here for dinner when he's going away to-night."

"I'd like to know why he couldn't," Peter retorted. "If you ask me—"

And then Marjorie did something which under no other circumstances whatsoever could she have been induced to do: she stepped hard on Peter's foot.

Unfortunately, however, she did not silence him.

"Ouch!" he shouted.

"Oh!" said Marjorie. "Oh, Peter, did I hurt you? I'm so sorry." And no one in the room, except, perhaps, Peter, doubted that she spoke the truth. If Marjorie did not literally wear her heart upon her sleeve, her love for Peter looked steadily and unwaveringly out of her brown eyes.

But Peter was paying no attention whatsoever to Marjorie's eyes. He had a vague idea that he had been interrupted in something he very much wanted to say.

"What was I talking about?" he inquired resentfully.

This time the flow of his eloquence was stemmed by Colin, who announced that he must hurry along.

"Why not stay for dinner?" Peter asked. "Why not help us eat all the grand spread prepared for that bum who didn't show up?"

"Not to-night," Colin declined firmly. "I really have some work I should do."

"But you were going to take Nancy out to dinner—"

Again Peter was silenced—this time by a positive glare from his sister Theodora.

For the next week the Holliday family found Nancy strangely subdued. Even Peter, having been coached and reprimanded by his mother, was more than ordinarily nice to her. But Nancy's usually happy little heart remained strangely heavy. She was puzzled and hurt, but she was trying to be fair.

Of course, she reasoned, Keith couldn't possibly know how greatly he had inconvenienced her and her entire family. It would never have occurred to him that the Hollidays would make great preparations because they expected him for dinner. In the homes he knew no special preparation was necessary for one visitor. Neither could Keith suspect how his failure to accept that dinner invitation would humiliate her.

And yet, Nancy realized, if he had loved her he would not have missed that opportunity to come. But there it was: Keith was not actually in love with her. She had not supposed that he was—yet. She knew only that he found her attractive, and she hoped that he might one day grow to care more. So why, then, should she be angry with him?

So Nancy reasoned. And so might any girl reason who had never before been slighted, nor neglected nor humiliated. Such things had had no place in her life. Therefore she neither feared nor expected them.

There was, however, one thing which she regretted with all the fervor of her twenty-one years: If only Colin had not been present when Keith telephoned! If only Colin might have been kept in ignorance of the whole affair!

She received two picture post cards from Keith during the week, which were just about as satisfactory as post cards usually are, and she neither saw

nor heard from Colin. She felt deeply annoyed with Colin—much more annoyed than she was with Keith.

And then, early Saturday afternoon, she came dashing into the house with the same glad impetuosity which had marked her return the week before.

"I'm going out to the Penningtons' at Oyster Bay to spend the week-end," she announced blithely to her mother and Sunny. "Keith sent me a letter to the office from his sister, inviting me out there." And with ill-disguised pride she handed the letter to her mother.

Mrs. Holliday opened it and read:

DEAR NAN:

You don't mind if I call you that, do you? I've heard so much about you from Keith.

Won't you come out to Oyster Bay to-morrow and spend the week-end with us? We are expecting a number of other people, and of course Keith will be here.

We both hope you can come.

Cordially yours,

PATRICIA PENNINGTON.

At the bottom of the letter Keith had written:

Please come. There'll be a motor at the station to meet all the trains to-morrow afternoon—and I'll be fearfully disappointed if you don't come riding up to the house in it.

Yours, KEITH.

For the next hour confusion reigned beneath the Hollidays' roof. Nancy was packing her things and she had, they soon discovered, a rather meager assortment of clothes for a week-end at a palace at Oyster Bay. But Sunny gladly offered for the occasion her new silk sports frock and small black felt hat, and Theodora was called on to loan her new tweed coat to the traveler. Theo readily agreed to contribute the coat and two new pairs of dull silk stockings. Fortunately Nancy had a new evening dress. It would not, she feared, stand comparison with the evening frocks which Patricia Pennington and her friends would wear, but it would have to do.

All the way in to New York and out on Long Island Nancy felt happily grateful to that dear family of hers. Oh, they were wonderful! If ever she *should* marry a rich man, what a lot she would do for them all!

Two other girls, rather pretty and distinctly smart, left the train at Oyster Bay. When a trim chauffeur in livery approached these girls, doffed his hat, and inquired if they were waiting for the Pennington motor, Nancy rather shyly explained that she, too, was going to the Penningtons'.

A few minutes later all three girls were seated in the car, chatting after the manner of strangers bound for the same house party.

It became evident to Nancy, as they drove along, that her companions knew each other quite well.

"I hear," one of them remarked, "that Patricia has finally succeeded in inducing Colin Hunt to come out here for the week-end, so I presume we'll see him at last. Thrilling, isn't it?"

"Oh, rather!" the other girl agreed lazily. "I'm positively mad about that man's voice, aren't you?"

"I am," the first speaker admitted. "And so is Patricia. We, therefore, won't have a look in. Any man who could have Patricia would most certainly want her."

Nancy said nothing. She was startled and amazed and annoyed, all at once. So Colin Hunt was to be out here this week-end! Nothing, she felt certain, could have astonished her more. Colin, visiting the Penningtons! Colin, sought after and desired by

these girls and by Patricia Pennington! And yet, Nancy remembered, she had always realized that girls fell hard for the romantic quality of Colin's voice heard over the radio. He had a tremendous feminine following.

That was funny, too. Colin was so directly opposite from the matinée idol type. And naturally, to a girl who had known him when he had the mumps, he wouldn't seem at all romantic. But anyway, Nancy told herself a trifle forlornly, it wouldn't make a bit of difference to her if Colin did marry Patricia Pennington. Oh, no, not a *bit* of difference. How could it, when she, herself, wanted to marry Keith?

RESOLUTELY, then, she turned her attention to the good time ahead of her, and she was only slightly conscious of the pleasure she was taking in this opportunity to show Colin that, after all, Keith Pennington really did like her tremendously.

And wouldn't Colin be surprised to see her here?

Colin was surprised. But so, it appeared, was Patricia Pennington.

When the car drew up before a great white palace of a house set in a vast and formal garden, the three girls alighted, entered a wide and, to Nancy, strangely magnificent hall, and were led by the butler into the drawing-room.

Nancy had never before seen anything like that drawing-room. There were priceless old rugs, deeply, richly colored, on the polished floor. Logs were blazing in the fireplace, and they glowed warmly upon the massive silver service and fragile china on the tea table. Deep-seated chairs were drawn up to the tea table and to the fireplace. Beyond this glow the room was in shadows, but somewhere, Nancy knew, there were hothouse roses; the air was fragrant with them.

A girl and two men arose as the newcomers entered. One of the men was Colin Hunt. He looked astonished at the sight of Nancy, who gave him a cool little bow. The tall fair girl beside Colin was, Nancy supposed, Patricia.

Nancy waited until their greetings of the other two girls were over; then she, too, approached her hostess.

She was determined not to appear shy with Colin looking on, and yet there was a certain amount of shyness in her manner. "How do you do?" she said. "I'm—Nancy Holliday."

Miss Pennington smiled at her. It was a vaguely pleasant smile; but the gray eyes above it were puzzled.

"Yes?" she said, and waited.

Nancy waited, too. For some reason her heart was beginning to hammer painfully and the roof of her mouth felt suddenly dry.

"Did you—want to see me?" Patricia inquired.

Poor Nancy!

"Why, I— You invited me to come for the week-end," she faltered.

At that moment Keith entered the drawing-room. Nancy saw him just as he caught sight of her, and his eyes were fixed upon her in blank astonishment.

Only for a moment did he hesitate; then he came straight to her side.

"Hello, there," he began uncertainly. "Can I do anything for you?"

Just like that: "Can I do anything for you?" Nancy felt as though the lovely old rug and the floor beneath it were collapsing under her feet.

"You—I—I received your letter—or rather Miss Pennington's letter which you sent to me, asking me to come out here," she said helplessly.

Slow understanding broke across Keith's face.

"Do you mean to say that I sent you the letter Patricia wrote to Nanette Carr?" he asked, and then, before Nancy could speak, "But, yes, of course that's what I did! Nanette's studying music in New York and I knew her brother at college. I asked Patricia to invite her out for the week-end. Then I wrote you a note about some work at the office, and like a prize idiot, I must have put them in the wrong envelopes. But"—with determined lightness—"there isn't any harm done. I'll explain to Nan Carr how I mixed the letters, and as for you, Nancy Holliday, now that you're here you must remain—mustn't she, Patricia?"

"Oh, yes, yes, indeed," Miss Pennington murmured vaguely.

"Thank you," said Nancy. "Thank you a lot, but I couldn't possibly. There"—she glanced hurriedly out of the window—"there's a car outside, now. I feel sure the owner will take me to the station."

"But if you must go," Patricia began, "I'll order a car for you—"

"No, please! I—I couldn't wait." Then, with a muffled "Good-by," Nancy almost ran from the room.

Past the dignified butler she hurried, and out the front door. Such an ignominious retreat she was making in Sunny's new sports frock and Theo's new tweed coat! Oh, what would they think? What would they say when they knew she had come out to the Penningtons' house, all prepared to spend a week-end, when she had never been invited at all?

But it was not what her family would say or think that was bringing this lump into Nancy's throat and the blinding tears to her eyes. It was something else. What? Nancy wondered. And then, quite suddenly, she knew: she felt so terrible, so very, very terrible that she wanted to die, because Colin Hunt had stood there in that drawing-room and witnessed her humiliation. Colin knew that she had come out here to visit people who had neither invited nor wanted her!

"Oh," she thought desperately, "I don't love Keith. I was only—dazzled by him. Why, I wouldn't care if I never *saw* him again! I love Colin—oh, I do love him! And now I'll never look him in the face as long as I live. What *must* he think of me?"

"NANCY," an imperative voice called. "Nan, wait, dear!"

Colin! Colin was coming after her! Oh, she wouldn't, couldn't see him!

Down the gravel path she sped toward the car that was still waiting there. But footsteps came swiftly behind her, and by the time she had reached the car Colin was there to open the door for her.

"It's mine," he explained easily. "It was just delivered to-day. How do you like it, Nan?"

"But—but I can't let you take me home," she stammered. "You—you're staying for the week-end."

"Indeed I'm not," he assured her. "I never agreed to do anything of the sort. I drove out this afternoon, intending to leave before dinner. So—jump in, Nan."

Nancy was a small girl—only five feet two—but never in her life had she felt quite so small as when she huddled down in the corner of Colin's new car and permitted him to drive her through the grounds of the Pennington estate and out on to the road.

For some time neither of them

spoke; then, when they had left Oyster Bay behind them, the young man turned the car into a narrow lane, brought it to a stop, and drew the girl almost roughly into his arms.

"It seems to me," he remarked, his voice gruff with emotion, "that I've had about enough nonsense from you, young woman. Don't you think it's almost time you admit that you love me and—promise to marry me?"

"But—but how do you know I love you, Colin?" Nancy whispered, her blue eyes wide with surprise.

"Always," he said promptly. "But you, sweetheart, how long have you known it?"

"J-just now, when I realized that I didn't mind coming to spend a week-end here, uninvited, half as much as I minded your knowing about it."

"But, darling, you didn't suppose, did you, that I'd think any the less of you?"

"Oh, but Colin, it was so *dreadful* to come out here like this when they weren't expecting me—"

He tightened his arms about her; then:

"Don't think any more about it, precious," he pleaded. "And you don't really care about that Pennington chap, do you?"

"No—oh, no! I never want to *see* him again. I wouldn't marry him for the whole world, even if he asked me to. I love you, Colin! I don't deserve you, not for a minute—but, oh, I love you!"

Colin pressed his cheek to hers, and then, slowly, lingeringly, turned his face until their lips met.

It seemed to Nancy that the car became a winged plane which lifted them up, up, until all that was weary and humdrum in the world was left behind.

"And I thought," she marveled dreamily, "I really thought you couldn't be romantic just because, when we were youngsters, you gave me the mumps!"

"But I'm not romantic, darling," he protested. "That is—only with you—"

"And you don't like Patricia Pennington even a little bit—that way?"

Colin laughed, crushed her to him, and kissed her over and over again.

"Patricia Pennington doesn't mean a thing to me, sweetheart," he asserted. "You've always been my girl, Nan, and you always will be."

"But why didn't you make me see before that I loved you?" she asked him.

"I couldn't make you see, darling. All I could do was wait until you got over your Keith Pennington brainstorm. It was hard, though, sweetheart, that waiting. I was beginning to be afraid you might never know you cared for me, and might even marry somebody else. But then, just now, when I saw your face, I felt that you did know—"

Nancy pressed her lips to his.

"And I *did!*" she exulted. "Oh, Colin, I'm so happy! And won't mother be delighted? She's always wanted me to marry you. She'll be surprised, though, won't she, when she sees me coming home and learns that I wasn't expected at the Penningtons?"

"You don't need to tell them at home about that," Colin pointed out. "You can just say that we got engaged, and you decided to come home."

"Perhaps," said Nancy thoughtfully, "I'll tell that story to Sunny and Peter and Theo, but I think I'll tell mother the truth. She'll understand. She always understands everything."

"And will she let you marry me right away?"

Nancy tightened her arms about his neck.

"How soon is right away?"

"Well, how about Monday?"

"Oh, Colin, no! I'm marrying a great and famous radio singer. We've got to have a big wedding with Theo for matron of honor and Sunny and Marjorie for bridesmaids."

Colin groaned.

"Is that the only way I can get you?" he asked cautiously.

"No," said Nancy, smiling up at him. "If you like, we'll have the tiniest wedding you ever saw."

Colin bent his head until their lips clung together.

"Oh, what do I care about the wedding?" he capitulated. "The more people who come to see you given to me, the more there will be to envy me, Nancy mine."

And so, as Nancy kissed him, she saw a vision of herself in a white satin down and a filmy veil, and she heard music—choir boys singing, "Oh, Perfect Love." For what else could they sing for Colin and for her?

"MARJORIE'S HOLLIDAY," the third love story in Miss Donoher's charming series about the Holliday family, will appear in an early issue of

ALL-STORY MAGAZINE

SECOND LOVE IS BEST

I LOVED him once, but that was when
I was too young to know my heart—
Before I learned the ways of men,
Or knew the good and bad apart.

Now that I bear another's name,
His eyes speak things he dare not say;
And when we meet, with sense of shame
I blush and quickly look away.

I should not need to close my heart
Against him, could he feel or see
That bonds of love hold us apart,
And merely be a friend to me.

—*Howard C. Kegley*

Love Braves the Storm

Another Romance of the Frozen North

By FLORIA HOWE BRUESS

THE flames of the camp fire threw alluring defiance to the deepening shadows of the crowding woods. They painted the tops of near-by tents with crimson splashes. The river sang softly as though crooning itself to sleep. In the dark velvet sky the first star of evening sprang.

Pleasantly tired after their day of sport, the girls and men lay around the fire. Finally Phil yawned, stretched, broke silence.

"It's almost over," he said regretfully. "Two more days and we'll be at the railway station, starting back to the squawk and grime of our beloved city. It's been great. I hate, and how! to leave these woods."

Charlotte came erect. "Why not stay on another month, Phil?" she suggested. "This outdoor life has made a new man of you; you've been working too hard the past year. Every one saw how fagged you looked before we left on this hunting lark." She looked across the fire, met her father's eyes and flashed a signal.

Phil shrugged. "Man must live by the sweat of his brow—at least, those not born with the golden spoon."

Her love was a magnet drawing her close to him, but he—was not free to love

"Piffle, rubbish and several other things," Charlotte interrupted tartly. "The little old job will still be there when you're ready to return to white collars. Won't it, dad?"

She turned her spirited young face full on her father and gave him a meaning look.

"Charlotte's right, my boy. This past month in the woods has set you up nicely," Mr. Holden agreed. "Another month and you'll be fit as—"

Phil jerked to a sitting posture.

"You and Charlotte talk as though I'm an invalid," he glowered. "I'm fit now. What's the big idea?"

"My word! Touchy! You know your nerves were shot. Too hard work by day and too hard play by night," Charlotte said, sparkling eyes on her fiancé. "A few more weeks in the great open spaces are your medicine. However, don't stay if you don't want to. It was your own wish," she added softly.

"Stay if you like, Phil," Charlotte's father said indulgently. "But if you do, bring me a fine moose head when you come back."

Sue, daughter of their guide, listened with heart and ears. Would Phil, wonderful Phil, remain?

The firelight was on her vivid dark face, with its black, pansy-like eyes. But the fire did not account for the glow in those eyes as she looked at Phil.

He lay beside her, staring up at the darkening sky. How tinglingly aware of him she was! The mere touch of his hand could rouse shivering gladness in her heart; could make the blood race in her veins.

"It's mighty tempting. It would be great to see one of these Northern blizzards I've read about. And hunt moose—" Phil paused, his eyes on Matt, the guide.

Matt cleared his throat, rose, brought a fresh log for the fire. A shower of sparks ascended as he laid it in place. Slowly the rugged woodsman spoke.

"It's the middle of October now. Another month and the first blizzard will hit us. But the moose season opens in ten days. By November it'll be too cold to camp out, for you're not used to it; but if you want to, you can live at my cabin—it's plenty big—and do your moose hunting from there."

With a joyous shout Phil sprang to his feet. He grabbed a blanket, threw it around him, pulled his woodsman's knife from his sheath, held it high and danced around the fire, wild Indian whoops splitting the silent woods.

They laughed, cheered him on. Sue seized an empty pail and beat on it with a hammer. Overhead a drowsy bird sent out a protesting "cheep."

It was settled. Phil was to remain another month. And the Fates started busily weaving their web of sorrow, of suffering, of danger, of—love!

SOMETHING deepened in Sue's eyes as the days went on. There was something so altogether lovely in her little face that often her father looked wonderingly at her.

Each day he and Phil set out in quest of moose. Each night they returned to a warm, cheery cabin, great logs crackling on the big hearth; the fragrance of an appetizing supper greeting them.

Sue, soft eyed and radiant, would hover over them. After supper Phil would sprawl by the fire, a lazy grace in his slim young body clad in its rough clothes. And always there was the thrilling consciousness of his nearness.

Her love was a magnet drawing her close to him, and gradually he became tremendously aware of it. Two young things vitally alive, thrilling to the wonderful fact of each other.

"A sweet little thing—easily hurt," Phil told himself repeatedly. "I must not hurt her. She begins to—like me. It won't do. Charlotte and I are to be married after Christmas.

"Yet—oh, what the dickens! Am I falling for this little wood nymph? Sue—" He spoke lingeringly, caress-

ing the name. "Sue. What a sweet little name it is."

A wildness was in the air, a breath of coming winter. Crisp leaves disintegrated under foot with sodden silence. Strong winds rocked the tops of trees. The weird notes of migrating birds had ceased. Soon ice would creep from the river shore and pounce upon the water.

And Sue's eyes took on a haunting deepness. Sue's lovely face became wistful and her laugh less ready. With tremulous eagerness she hovered over Phil when the two returned from their daily hunt. Several fine moose heads lay in the pelt house, trophies of his gun.

Often she went through the silent woods to meet them. Treasuring each hour, every minute that she could be near Phil. Finally she accompanied them on their hunts, jealous of the nights that took him from her. Anything to be with the man she loved, she felt humbly.

It was impossible that Phil could not sense her growing panic as the time of his departure grew near, and with a reluctance he could not explain he saw the days fly all too swiftly.

"Believe I made a mistake," he told himself. "I should have gone home with the crowd. Don't want to hurt little Sue. She's too sweet a little kid."

THEY sat before the fire, pleasantly tired after their day's tramp, talking idly, with long, comfortable pauses.

"Guess I'd better be leaving in a day or two, Matt. Winter will soon hit the North. It's getting pretty cold. Did you notice that rim of ice on the river this morning? I mustn't get snowed in here—"

Sue was frightened by the sudden rush of blood through her veins.

"Oh, don't go yet," her heart was begging. "Stay a little longer," her eyes pleaded. But aloud she said, "It's almost time for our first blizzard. Don't you want to see it?"

Breathlessly she watched his frowning face. Of what was he thinking? The usual gay, careless expression was gone; his lips were grimly set.

"Aren't you comfortable here?" she ventured, unable to bear the lengthening silence.

Phil stirred. "Comfortable? Like nobody's business," he returned with a flash of his old smile. "I never knew forest cabins could be so comfortable." He looked around the bright, cheery living room.

Heads of moose and caribou adorned the log walls; a gun-rack and pipe-rack hung near by. Long low bookcases, crowded with well-thumbed books; wide couch piled with gay pillows; deep, soft chairs built for ease, not appearance. A victrola, a radio, a table piled with magazines brought a breath of the outside world into this forest home.

"And how I sleep. Baby, how papa does sleep!" he went on.

Matt, head bent over a Fur magazine, looked up frowningly. What silly slang young people used these days. Thank heaven, Sue used pure English. Her education was good; he had seen to that, woodsman though he was.

She found herself smiling happily at the young man. "Then you'll stay—longer?" Hope trembled in her voice, glowed in her beautiful dark eyes.

"Afraid not, Sue. Must be getting back. I'd like another month up here, but the factory whistle's blowing and I must be on the job."

The light died from Sue's face; her sweet lips drooped. There was pain in her heart, pain so real it was as though a knife had thrust its way into the quivering flesh.

It was over. She would no longer hear Phil's bantering voice, watch the firelight on his thick blond hair. How could she stand it? How bear the long aching days? How much could one suffer and go on living?

Matt closed his magazine. "There's going to be a big demand for fox pelts, and prices are up. After the first snow I'll set my traps," he informed them. Matt was trapper by winter, guide by summer.

"Snow?" Phil asked lazily.

"Yes. The pelts aren't in prime condition until after the first snow. Well, I'm turning in. You kids better follow soon," he said. "Good night, Sue and Phil."

The girl rose, kissed her father, watched him enter his bedroom and close the door behind him.

SHE returned to the fire, stood with her hands clasped loosely before her. The leaping flames shone on her hair, dark, fine as silk; lighted her wistful dark eyes fringed with their extraordinarily long lashes. It deepened the rose in her cheeks and lips; a rose induced by perfect health and outdoor life. It played on her tender lips. There was something very appealing in her pose as she stood there.

Phil's pulses quickened; his breath came a little unsteadily as he watched her.

"Building castles in the fire?" he asked, breaking the long silence.

She turned and her eyes clung desperately to his smiling face.

There was something in those eyes that no man could resist. Phil felt himself rising from his chair, even as he heard the warning his brain shot at him. "Don't do it—don't hurt her. It will be a hurt she'll never forget—tender, sensitive little thing that she is—not sophisticated—credulous—"

He stood before her motionless, speechless, heeding that warning voice of his conscience.

Sue stretched out her hand and laid it almost timidly on his arm. "Phil, can't you stay longer? Don't go yet. I'll miss you—"

Something played like a tongue of fire between them. Their eyes clung together, and Sue trembled with a hushed expectation. Embrace was imminent, inevitable. Romance, bewildering, intoxicating, broke over them, showering them with glowing sparks—sparks that ignited their hearts, their blood.

He swept her into his arms, buried his face in her soft hair. Her arm crept up around his neck. He looked down at her little face; then with a half groan he kissed her eyelids, her cheeks, her round little chin. Her lips he would not touch, though it took more control than he had ever exercised in his life. They lay so near, so eager, so—waiting. And he had taken his kisses lightly, easily, as he had gone through life.

With a shock he realized that he was doing the very thing he had feared and fought against. He put her from him so savagely that she almost fell.

"I'm a beast, Sue. I—"

Her hand went to her throat as she stood staring at him. Realization was slow in coming, but finally the truth burned itself into her consciousness, set its teeth in her heart.

"You—you don't love me?" she whispered, lips white, eyes strained.

"I'm fond of you, Sue—you're

such a sweet little kid, but I'm engaged to Charlotte Holden. I guess you didn't know that. We're to be married after Christmas."

Quiet. How quiet was the room. As though something dead lay in it, and indeed there was: a stabbed heart; joy that had died; happiness vanished.

or two and you'll forget you ever knew me," he finished.

SUE sat before the fire—sat until the logs became a glowing mound of ashes and a chill crept over the room. The wind was rising, and its voice held a note of desolation.

"Gee, I'd like to stay up here!" he said. "Live in the open a few more weeks—hunt and trap, and see a real Northern blizzard. But it's back to the grind to-morrow"

"Don't look at me like that, Sue," his voice came hoarsely. "I'm sorry. Be a good little sport and forget it. I'm sorry I touched you—held you in my arms."

He walked to his room. It was hard, too hard to look at her stricken face. "Good night, Sue. I'll leave in a day

She shivered, rose and walked to her room, undressed with trembling hands and crept into bed. For a time she lay staring into the darkness; then the tears came, tears that drained themselves from her very heart; hard, terrible sobs tore from her quivering throat.

"How can I bear it?" she whispered passionately. "I can't live, I don't want to live! Oh, how cruel, how cruel! Why do I love him so—and he belongs to that other girl. He loves her; she will be his wife—his wife! She can't love him as I do, she can't—can't!" She smothered her face in her pillow.

"How close he held me," she thought. "He must be a—little—fond of me. Or is that only the way men act? Was he only playing? He knows I love him. Oh, Phil—"

Frantic hands beating her pillow, salt of bitter tears on her lips; a madness of grief descending upon her. She ground her hands against her mouth to keep from crying aloud.

At last dawn came. Few words were spoken at their quick sunrise breakfast. Phil and Sue avoided each other's eyes. Then the men left on their hunt.

Through long dragging hours Sue, moving about her duties numbed with pain, exhausted with emotions. All zest in life was at an end; there was nothing to look forward to. Tomorrow Phil would leave.

Toward mid afternoon she heard steps on the porch. How strange they had returned so early! She heard Phil's voice and again her heart leaped at the dear sound.

She ran to open the door.

Matt was leaning heavily against the younger man, his face gray with pain.

Sue's heart raced, then stood still. "Dad!" she cried.

"Don't be frightened. I fell and twisted my knee. No bones broken—just a sprain. I'll make a crutch and hobble around. The day's hunt is over, anyway. Hear that wind? Blizzard will hit us soon."

They put Matt into a chair and Sue brought a pail of hot water while Phil removed the boot and sock. After the leg was bandaged Phil asked:

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Not a thing. Nothing but hot water for a sprain, and rest—"

"Then if I'm not needed I'll go on down to the valley. I'd like to get that moose whose tracks we saw." Impossible to remain all day in the cabin, watching Sue—Sue with her haunting ardent eyes; her lovely, vivid little face.

"Better not go, my boy," Matt warned him. "Blizzard may break in an hour or two. You don't know the North."

"I'll chance it." The door closed behind him.

ANXIOUSLY Matt listened to the shrill whine of the wind. "I shouldn't have allowed him to go, Sue," he said for the tenth time. "The blizzard will break any minute. That boy doesn't realize what it's like."

"Surely he'll turn back?" Sue steadied the quaver in her voice. She was afraid, desperately afraid, for the first time in her life.

The wind caught at the door, shaking it as though it would tear it from its hinges. The bare branches of trees tapped on the roof like skeleton fingers.

Sue, her face pressed to the window, saw the first snow of the season fall. Thicker and faster until it was like a great white blanket. Within a few minutes it had turned to sleet, ice-pointed, filling the air like sand, cutting, swirling. How easily a man could get lost in that blinding snowfall!

How quickly the cold increased! The North grown deadly in its power. The wind came with the roar of a thousand bulls, infuriated, challenging. Rapidly the thermometer fell—ten

above zero, zero, five below, fifteen below.

The trees groaned, writhed in the onslaught of gale; the cabin shook beneath its pressure.

"Dad, dad, Phil's lost! He doesn't know these woods as we do. He has nothing with which to build a fire. He has no ax to cut wood—" The girl's hands clenched, her eyes were wild.

Phil in the forest alone, staggering, buffeted by the icy gale; unable to see, to find the way, all trails obliterated—Sue's heart beat suffocatingly; the pain of it was intolerable.

"Curse this leg of mine. If I hadn't sprained it this never would have happened," Matt growled.

Time passed, minutes filled with dread suspense.

Sue paced the floor, pausing to stare from the window, face pressed flat to the glazing pane, incoherent prayer in her heart.

Suddenly she turned, faced her father. "Dad, he'll freeze to death! I can't stand this. He's lost or he'd be here by this time." She paused chokingly, then hurried on: "I'm going to look for him. The snow is deep now; a foot must have fallen, and it will be hard crusted, for it's so terribly cold. I'm going to take the sled and dogs, and some blankets, and a sack of dry wood."

"No!" Matt thundered, and sprang from his chair, only to fall back with a stifled groan. "You shan't go! It's too dangerous—"

Sue faced him defiantly, little fists clenched, face white, eyes blazing. "I will go!" she cried. "I *must* go! Do you think I can sit here warm and safe while Phil's out in the storm?"

"Sue!" Matt looked at the tortured girl, read the agony in her eyes, heard the heartbreak in her voice. He groaned, and for a moment covered his eyes with his hand; he understood at last.

The world-old mystery of human love, the wonder of its self-sacrifice was there before him. And this priceless love, springing pure, unsullied, from his girl's heart had been given to a careless, indifferent man from the city—a man from another world!

"I'm going, dad. King's a good leader—he can't get lost. And I'll put Star, Buddy and Northboy in harness. We'll find Phil. Oh, dad, we *must* find him or I'll—I'll die, too! I can't stand it!"

Within ten minutes she was ready, the dogs harnessed, the sled piled with dry wood, covered with blankets. Sue ran to the room where her father sat silently, haggard-eyed. She pulled on her fur parka, thrust her feet into knee-length moccasin boots.

Working with feverish haste, she pulled on her rabbit skin mittens, picked up her snowshoes. She ran to her father, knelt a moment by his chair, raised his hand to her burning cheek. Then she kissed him.

"Don't worry, dad. I'll find him and bring him back—soon. Don't worry—I'll be safe. You and I've been out in blizzards worse than this."

"But you weren't alone. Once more, Sue, I beg you not to go. I—I command you not to go!"

"For the first time in my life I must disobey you, dad."

She sprang to her feet, ran to the door. The wind blew it shut behind her. Matt hobbled on a cane to the window and watched his daughter throw her snowshoes into the sled and spring on the runners behind the wheel dog.

"Mush!" she cried. The dogs gave a tug; the sled moved forward, the

little fur-clad figure swaying on the runners.

AN hour passed—two hours. Matt sat by the fire, his head sunk on his chest. Occasionally he moved to put a fresh log on the flames. He listened to the savage roar of the wind. It wasn't quite so bad now; its fury was dying a little, coming in gusts with periods of lull between.

How slowly, how heavily, the minutes ticked away! Sue, his little girl, out there battling her way, no thought in her heart save for the man she loved. Oh, God!

There was a fumbling hand on the door latch. Electrified by hope, Matt straightened. Sue had turned back—

The door flung open and Phil, ice-coated, swaying, fell into the room. Matt's heart stood still as he stared at the prostrate form. Then grasping his cane he hobbled to the door, stared out into the fast-falling night. Where were the dogs—the sled—Sue!

He closed the door, grasped Phil's shoulder. "Sue," he croaked hoarsely. "Where's Sue?"

"What—who—you see I made it. I got back—had a devil of a time—" Phil's old boyish smile looked strange on his gray, tired face.

"Sue!" Matt shook the shoulder under his fingers. "Where's Sue?"

The words penetrated Phil's almost numb senses. He looked wonderingly at the other's dead-white face and wild eyes.

"Why, isn't she here?"

Matt groaned. "She went out two hours ago to find you. She was crazy—I couldn't do anything with her. She thought you were lost; thought you had fallen and were freezing somewhere—"

"Sue, out in *this?*" Phil's voice came hoarsely. Exhaustion forgotten, he sprang to his feet.

"Yes, looking for you. And she won't turn back till she finds you."

"My God!" Phil, fresh from the hell he had gone through, winced, quivered. It had been all he could do—a strong, athletic man, to reach the cabin. And Sue a girl, such a little thing, out there—

"She hasn't a chance," he groaned. "Not a chance—"

"Yes, she has a slim chance," her father said quickly. "She took the dogs and the sled. The wind is dying. Listen!"

But through the lull came a more deadly sound than the roar of the gale. The distant, long, aching howl of wolves—wolves, savage, pitiless, fierce with hunger. It was a sound to make the spine shiver.

With starting eyes the two men looked at each other.

"What ghastly noise is that?" the younger whispered.

"Timber wolves, the fiercest of all. When they're hungry they'll attack anything."

His lips suddenly dry as dust, Phil asked: "Sue took her rifle, of course?" His hands were shaking.

Matt looked swiftly at the gun-rack that hung on the wall.

"No. In her excitement she forgot, and I was so upset I never noticed!"

The men stared at each other, faces gray. Again the howl came, closer this time.

"It's the hunt cry. They're rushing in for the kill!" Matt's voice was a croak. "The scent of dogs carries far. Where's Sue—Sue?"

Exhaustion, weariness were forgotten. They did not exist for Phil. Nothing existed save Sue, and the fact she was in danger.

"Get me some more ammunition," he said swiftly, lips set, eyes grim.

"Drink some coffee first. The pot is on the hearth, it's hot. Eat something—curse my leg!" Matt groaned as he hobbled to the ammunition shelf.

Swiftly Phil gulped the heartening liquid. There was no time for food.

Perched on a limb, she listened, shuddering, to the battle below. Her dogs were fighting for their lives with the wolves, the terrors of the wild

"Use my snowshoes—in that closet. Make better time," Matt added.

A moment later and the boy was ready. "I'll get her, I'll find her!" he shouted as he dashed out.

The fresh spurt of wind took up his words, played with them, echoed them out across the white, lonely stretches.

SUE drove through the gray gloom, shouting, stopping to listen, ears strained, heart strained for the sound of an answering voice. She scrutinized the snow for sign of boot prints. She paused at the river and searched the ice that had spread out, silencing the waters. No dark form was visible on its wind-swept surface.

At every mound she encountered she stopped, prodded fearfully with the butt of her whip. Perhaps that mound would be Phil, fallen, and covered with snow. She went on searching, searching; in agony of heart and mind calling his name.

Exploring icy fingers thrust their way through her parka, chilling her flesh, flesh which a heart cold with dread could not warm. The cold increased. The dogs' fur became crusted with frost. They looked back at their mistress, a whine in their throats; why this apparently aimless wandering—this moving in circles, getting nowhere?

Fear became terror. Where was

Phil? Sobbing, the tears lingering on her cheeks until they became tiny pieces of ice, wild, incoherent prayers in her heart: "God—save Phil! Take me, but save Phil!"

Darkness fell, crushing the gray light. Night. Night, and he had not been found. Surely she had covered every foot of the ground of the valley.

Solitude. The solitude of the forest, lit by the snow on its floor. The wind had died. How sinister, how still the world seemed, after the fury of its voice.

What was that? The dogs stopped, growling; every hair on their backs bristled. They had heard the voice of the terrors of the wild, high lords of the forests. Wolves!

They were coming fast, for the dog-scent was brought to them on the up-wind, long gray bodies running low to the snow, tongues lolling, fangs bared. They were running in a half-moon cordon. Now they were near their game and closed in for the kill.

Swiftly Sue loosed the dogs from their harness. They should have an opportunity to fight unencumbered for their lives, or to run. Too late now she thought of her rifle.

She ran to a tree, climbed up. The first branch hung too low. A snapping, jumping wolf could reach her. She climbed higher to safety—no wolf could reach her here. Unless—unless, numbed with cold, she fell.

Perched on a limb she listened, shuddering, to the sounds of battle below. She peered through the branches, saw the dark bodies lolling, leaping, struggling. Ah, the dogs were running now. Fleet as wolves themselves, perhaps they would outdistance their enemies.

All grew still. Only the howl of the wolves came back to her, fainter and fainter, as they pursued the fleeing dogs. Fearfully she stared at the empty snow below, slid stiffly, shaking with cold, down the tree. She must build a fire at once. All forest animals fear fire.

Quickly she gathered an armful of wood from her sled, and in a trice the fire began to catch, to crackle, to throw out its light and heat.

"It will be a beacon," she said with sobbing breath. "If Phil has not fallen he will see it. Phil—oh, my darling—keep going. Don't fall, don't fall!"

She pulled the sled close to the fire and all during that hideous night she replenished it with wood. She dared not leave its security, for after a time a wolf returned, prowling. In the darkness beyond she saw its eyes, yellow balls of blazing light that seemed to hang suspended in mid-air.

The heavy clouds rolled back, and the sky cleared. Huddled by the fire the girl sat, death in her heart, agony in every breath she drew. Phil, Phil—

The long night fled before the break of dawn. Dawn and a clear sky, bitter cold. With the coming of day the wolf that had circled the fire all night trotted away.

Sue rose, stretched her cramped limbs, beat the slow circulation into her body. There was a terrible look on her young face, terrible shadows in her eyes.

"Phil," she whispered with stiff lips, "when I find you I shall lie down beside you. I could not have you living, but I can be near you—dead."

She stumbled on, seeking, seeking. A mound, snow-covered—was it Phil? With shaking hands she tore at the snow and uncovered—only a log.

The sun rose, glaring against the white land. Tree and shrub sparkled

with millions of diamond points. The ice of the river blazed like polished steel.

Sue pressed her hands to her eyes that were beginning to ache intolerably.

She cried aloud as a pain, intense, searing, shot through her head. Tears started down her cheeks. After a while she opened her eyes—stood rigid, deadly pale. Hesitatingly she brushed her hand over her eyes, felt the lids to see if they were open.

"Blind!" she whispered in terror. "Snow-blind!" She sank on the snow, buried her head in her arms.

If she walked on there was danger of falling down a ravine; if she sat still she would freeze. And at night the wolves would be back. "Oh, Phil, my darling," she sobbed. "Even in death I cannot be near you." Her head sank lower in her arms.

HOW Phil ever got through that night was a miracle to him. It was a nightmare. Hour by hour the snowdrifts rose.

He stumbled on wearily, aching in mind and body.

When he shouted Sue's name the wind caught his voice away; when he fired his rifle the thick, wet atmosphere deadened its report. Unless Sue was very near she could not hear it. And the wolves! How quiet they were now. What did that mean?

"Little girl—poor, sweet little kid," he groaned as he pushed on in his search. "Where are you?" Helpless tears rolled down his face. Tears of overwhelming grief; of terrible exhaustion; of hopelessness.

"Brave heart that brought her out in this for me—" he muttered continually.

His mind began to wander, tired out as he was and numbed by the piercing cold. Frantically he realized it and stumbled on, forcing his gait to the uttermost, beating his body with his arms to accelerate the sluggish blood.

At last the dawn; the sun rose, flashing and gleaming on millions of prisms on shrub and tree. It was blinding, dazzling.

Phil reached in the parka pocket, brought out a pair of dark glasses and fitted them to his eyes.

Every muscle in his body screamed in pain, his hands and feet were leaden. But no thought of turning back to shelter crossed his mind.

"Sue! Sue! Where are you?" he began to call again.

At last, as he wandered, he looked down at the snow and saw—footprints!

His heart raced; a sudden warmth entered his chilled body. New strength replaced exhaustion. Footprints of recent make!

A strangled sound came from his gray lips. His haggard, bloodshot eyes brightened. He followed the prints until at last he came upon her, a little, bowed, shaking figure, head in her arms.

"Sue!" His voice was raw and hoarse, yet she knew it. The one voice in the world, no matter how changed. Yet was it delusion? Was she beginning to freeze and her mind wandering?

Hesitatingly she came to her feet. If she could only see!

"Sue, I've found you!" No mistaking that voice!

"Is it really you, Phil?" Incredulity struggled with joy, fierce, overwhelming joy.

She felt herself swept into his arms. Even in her gladness that Phil lived an awed wonder was in her. How those

arms strained her! They caught away her breath.

"I've found you, Sue. The blizzard couldn't beat us!" he cried exultantly. "The North at her worst is not as strong as love—love, Sue! Oh, how I've suffered, mentally far more than physically, for I didn't know—I didn't know until you were in danger, my darling, that I love you."

In ecstasy Sue listened. Could it be true? Could it possibly be true?

She raised her face and he looked down at her, started when he saw the swollen lids almost closing her sightless eyes!

"Sue!" he gasped. "Your eyes!"

"Snow blind. I'll be all right in a couple of days, when I'm away from the glare." It seemed her voice was singing instead of speaking the words.

"Snow-blind! What would have happened to you if I hadn't found you?" He sank on the snow, gathered her into his arms. Holding her, he rocked back and forth, her sweet weight against his heart. Her arms crept around his neck—something desperate in those clinging arms.

"He is mine for a few sweet hours, mine by right of love. If he must go to Charlotte, at least he's mine now," she was thinking.

His lips against hers, he told her again and again of his love. And as the parched and thirsty earth drinks up the sweetness of rain, so Sue's heart drank in his words.

"I don't know how it will come out, Sue—whether Charlotte will be willing to break the engagement. But I'm going to tell her I love you. Sue, do you love me? I want to hear it. Tell me, my darling."

"You know it. Oh, you know it. I do love you," she breathed, face crushed against his.

Incoherent words, because they were kissing each other ardently, tenderly, desperately.

"We must start back to the cabin now, Sue," he said at last. A thought came to him: "Why, where are your dogs?"

"Wolf attack last night. I loosed them. Hope some of them got home."

"Wolves?" he exclaimed, face whitening. "They attacked you. We heard them."

"I got up a tree." He looked at her wonderingly. How lightly she brushed aside that ghastly possibility of tragedy.

But Sue had forgotten all about the wolves. Phil was alive, safe! He loved her, had risked his life for her—

"Come, let's start back. Are you dreadfully tired, Phil, darling? You will have to lead me. I can't see a thing."

There was a little choking sound in his throat as he tightened an arm around her. Together they began the journey back to the cabin.

MATT, standing in the doorway, saw them coming. The dogs had got home safely and they ran to meet their mistress. The revulsion of feeling that swept her father when he saw her left him faint and dizzy, strong man though he was. Only he knew the hours of anguish he had lived through.

Few words were spoken at first. Warmth, rest, food were vital, and Matt saw to it that the boy and girl had all three. They sat in deep, low chairs beside the hearth, plates of food in their laps. Gradually strength returned and Matt heard the recital of each.

He picked Sue up in his arms, carried her to her bed, covered her warm-

ly. "Sleep awhile," he told her, lips working.

As he returned to the living room the young man looked up. There was something new in his face; the bantering, boyish look had gone. For Phil had stared into the eyes of death; he had seen his own soul, naked; his heart stripped, revealed, and—for the first time in his life—love had come to him.

"Matt," he said with steady voice and eyes, "a miracle happened out there in the forest. It's made a different man of me, and—a better man. I've taken life as it came, lived only on the surface. Last night I touched the depths.

"I'm not a free man, for I'm engaged to marry Charlotte Holden. She's a fine girl and I'm fond of her. But I know what *love* is now, love so great that I would have given my own life to save—Sue." He paused and the eyes of the two men locked.

"We love each other. No matter what the future holds, nothing can shake that. But Charlotte Holden is a proud, spirited girl. All her people know we are engaged, and she's getting ready for the wedding now. It would be a blow to her pride to acknowledge that—" Phil flushed painfully, paused.

"To acknowledge that her lover—jilted her?" Matt ended frankly.

Miserably Phil nodded. "But Sue's happiness is the dearest thing on earth to me. I'm willing to suffer if I must, but little Sue— So I'm going to tell Charlotte—ask her to release me."

He rose, walked to his room with leaden feet. "Guess I can sleep now. I wanted you to know," he said.

For a time exhaustion numbed Sue's thoughts. Then insidiously memory returned, and somber questioning. Would Charlotte give Phil up? With a sharp pang Sue recalled the girl's handsome, spirited face. She remembered, too, how constantly Charlotte had thrust her arm through Phil's in intimate, possessive fashion. How she had looked up into his eyes—

Hot jealousy seared Sue. "No," she cried wildly, "Charlotte has no right to him. He loves me—not her." She quivered when a small, insistent voice whispered in her brain: "She has a right to him—they are engaged. He is bound to her—"

Resentment, deep resentment poisoned Sue's heart. "Charlotte has everything, everything, but she won't give Phil to me. Handsome, wonderful Phil! What girl would give him up? But he is mine by right of love!"

A sense of outraged justice lashed her. Why should she be cheated of what was hers? "I am no heroine willing to sacrifice myself for another girl," she cried passionately. "I am only a girl, loving the man who should be mine. For Phil loves me, too. He never loved her—"

Maybe if she prayed? She had prayed in the forest and Phil had found her, had saved her from death. Yes, she would pray. She knelt beside the bed, oblivious of the icy cold of the room. But prayer would not come. Only thoughts of Phil, his face—

Hopelessly she climbed back into bed.

"He is bound in honor. I would not have him do anything dishonorable. If Charlottle won't release him, he must marry her. I feel I'm dying. Will there ever be anything again but this hopeless ache?" Waves of depression, black, deep, rolled over her. Finally exhausted, nature claimed her reckoning; the girl slept, slept with tears wet on her cheeks, with uneasy sighs on her lips.

Neither Sue nor Phil heard the dog

sled as it drew up to the cabin, nor did they hear the voices of Matt and a man in the living room. A little later the stranger left and Matt sat staring into the fire, waiting—

It was dusk when Phil awakened and came out into the living room.

Matt picked up a long white envelope that was lying on the table, handed it to him. "A friend of mine brought this up from the post office," he said. "It's special delivery, you see. When I opened the envelope I found this one, addressed to you."

Wonderingly Phil looked at it, then recognized the penmanship. With shaking fingers he tore open the envelope, read swiftly.

"Sue!" he shouted. "Bring her out here, Matt, quick!"

Matt hobbled to his daughter's room. In a moment he returned leading the girl. There were dark circles under her eyes, her little face was woebegone, wistful.

"Where are you, Phil?" she asked anxiously, little hands groping, for it would be another day or two before her sight would be normal. "Dad says you want me—"

Phil's arms were around her.

"I've had a letter, Sue. Came while I slept. Oh, darling, listen—" And how his voice throbbed!

Sue stood tense in his arms, her breath hurrying, hands clasped together.

"Listen, darling girl, while I read it.

"DEAR PHIL:

"It's hard for me to write this, but it's easier than telling you, for I'm a coward. You'll think I'm a rotter and Lord knows what, but, Phil, old dear, I never could have been really in love with you, for I've fallen frightfully in love with another man. Don't think too hard of me, Phil, but when this reaches you I'll be married. We are eloping tonight. Good luck, dear, and good-by. Be a good sport and don't cuss me. I'm divinely happy.

"CHARLOTTE."

Matt stood, eyes glowing, as he watched the two transfigured faces.

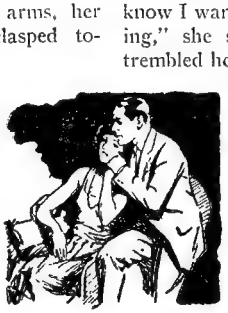
"Phil, it's really true?" Sue's voice thrilled.

"Here's the letter. Your dad can read it, and so shall you when your eyes are well. Oh, Sue! It means our happiness, everything on earth to us! Darling, my own darling, when are you going to marry me? Let's be married here, Sue; then we'll go to Chicago. But we'll come back here every summer and spend a new honeymoon."

She buried her face against her lover's coat. Her arms went around him, clinging, holding, and he held the trembling little body close to his heart.

"Marry me soon, darling?" he pleaded huskily.

"As soon as my eyes are well. You know I want to see the man I'm marrying," she said, and though her lips trembled her voice sang.



Mariana shrank away as he sneered at her: "Your new fiancé will never marry you after he sees these letters"

The Avenging Angel

By HELEN HARRIS

THE canary fluttered against his vermilion bars, as Mariana set the cage, swinging in its tall red standard, just outside the front door, under the wreathing bougainvillæa. The clustered purple blossoms mingled with golden sprays of twining allamanda, in a profusion characteristic of southern California. The little rose-hued bungalow, set in its wide sweep of lawn, and glorified by the flowering vines, looked like a perfect stage setting for a light-hearted musical comedy.

But the canary was quite indifferent to the brilliant scene. The only idea in his small brain just then was "Safety first." With plaintive, twittering cries he hopped about in his gaudy prison, and gazed down anxiously at the cause of his fright—a big, fluffy Persian cat stretched out on the stone-flagged terrace. That orange-hued aristocrat affected an air of bored indifference and dignity, but nevertheless he kept an observant eye cocked in the direction of the fluttering bird.

Mariana, bending over the flower beds, snipping off an occasional yellow leaf or faded blossom, at length became aware of the little drama going on behind her back. With an air of exasperation she gathered up the fluffy

tormentor in her arms and carried him away from the tempting canary.

"Now, Pat!" Her tone was sternly reproachful. The cat yawned widely and regarded her with a complacent air of innocence. "Pat, you really must learn to let Caruso alone! He's one of the family now, you see, and must always be treated kindly. So don't be rolling your beautiful green eyes at him any more!...Never mind, Caruso!" turning to the bird which had at once become tranquil. "Pat's only pretending that he wants to invite you to luncheon to-day! He really doesn't go in for a canary diet—his taste runs more to cream, and catnip, and—oh-h-h!"

She turned quickly at the sound of an approaching footstep. The advance of a strange, yet subtly familiar figure seemed instantly to cast a blight on the gay little bungalow.

"Oh-h, good Heavens! Why, it's—it's—"

"Right the first time, my dear," the newcomer drawled in a husky voice, as he cast a half-smoked cigarette on the lawn. "It really is I—a ghost from the past! You don't look exactly delighted, though. Surely you're not afraid of ghosts, Mariana!" He twirled a slender cane and looked at her with smiling mockery.

The girl shivered, and her hand crept to her throat. She gazed with widening eyes at this apparition which had suddenly darkened the wholesome sunshine into something sinister and evil.

He had taken off his soft gray hat, and stood revealed in the merciless clarity of the morning light, a tall, lean figure in a tailored gray suit which hung a trifle loosely on his spare frame. He had crisp black hair, just barbered, a clipped dark mustache which unfortunately did not conceal the lips. His profile would have delighted a sculptor: the lines of forehead, nose and chin might have been copied from a statue. Only the mouth seemed incongruous — and the eyes. The lips were weak and cruel; the eyelids narrowed over the dull, feverish stare of an intemperate man. A stranger would have guessed his age at thirty-two or thirty-three.

The girl continued to gaze at him in stupefied dismay, blind to the outstretched hand which at last dropped to his side. His loose lips took on an even more cynical curve under the dark mustache.

"Phil!" she exclaimed in a strangled voice, as though her tensed hand, still at her throat, fairly choked the words. "Phil!"

"My dear Mariana!" He bowed ceremoniously. "I am glad to find you still recall my name. It would be embarrassing for an old lover, returned from his wanderings, to learn his sweetheart had forgotten him!"

"Phil!" she gasped again, her eyes still fixed in startled unbelief upon his darkly smiling face. "I never expected to see you again!"

"Why, Mariana darling!" with mocking lightness in his tone. "How could you ever suspect me of unfaithfulness?"

"But—but—Phil—"

"Mariana, I have come all the way from Mexico to see you. Isn't it customary to invite a caller into the house, or at least, to have a chair? We have so much to talk over—our past, our present, and our future. Why not be more at ease while thus engaged?"

"Oh, Phil! Please go away!" she begged.

"Go away? Tut, tut, my child! I have but just arrived! Is this a sam-

ple of California hospitality? My dear, I'm afraid the State will disown you!"

He grinned unpleasantly, and his eyes wandered about the grounds. Then, "Aha! Unless my eyes deceive me, there's a marble bench under the cool shade of the rose arbor yonder. I know that bench is as hard as a woman's heart, but it's such a romantic setting! Come!" He seized her right hand in a determined grasp. "Let's pretend it's our old trysting place!" And he drew her determinedly across the lawn.

FOR a few moments they sat on the marble bench in guarded silence. Mariana gazed at the crooked old coconut palms, their sweeping fronds gilded in the sunlight. She saw the poincianas spread their lacy skirts and curtsy gayly to a wandering breeze. The rose-colored bungalow was flecked with sun and shadow. Pat lay stretched out in a rustic chair, and Caruso twittered peacefully in his cage. Everything about her looked the same—happiness and security seemed native to the place—yet the girl felt that some undefined peril was threatening her.

Phil was also glancing around with appraising eyes. "Fine little home, my dear," he drawled huskily, as he drew on a fresh cigarette. "Seems quite swanky to a roving adventurer, soldier of fortune, or whatever you've a mind to call me. Maybe 'rolling stone' is the appropriate term—eh, Mariana? At any rate, the moss never sticks to my fingers very long."

He slowly exhaled a spiral of blue smoke. "And while you've been living in this idyllic luxury, I don't suppose you ever gave a thought to your faithful lover, roving under tropic skies?"

"Why—why, it's—so long since you went away. But I've been living in my little house only a month. You see, a short time ago I inherited some money from poor old great aunt Sarah Winters—"

"Yes, I know."

"Oh-h! But how did you happen to learn about it 'way down there, Phil?"

"Read a very flowery account in a California paper," he sneered. "It was about the beautiful young heiress, Miss Mariana Winters, who had purchased a charming bungalow at 3615 Allamanda Avenue, in the exclusive Bel-Mar section of the city."

"Oh-h! Well, you see, I hadn't been living in luxury, as you call it, before that—quite the contrary! I've had a lot of trouble, Phil, since I last saw you—"

Her voice faltered and died. Her gaze drifted away to the horizon, where the bright blue of the sky melted into gray, and formless clouds hung about the mountain peaks. Presently she continued:

"Phil, my father died three years ago. His health had been poor for a long time, and he hadn't been able to look after his business. But he always relied implicitly on his partner, who turned out to be unworthy of trust. He—the partner—gathered up every bit of money he could collect, and disappeared, leaving nothing but wreckage and debt. Father tried—tried terribly—to make good, and the effort killed him."

She became lost in painful reverie. Philip's cynical, mocking tongue could find no words to fit his need. He maintained a discreet silence.

"And then," Mariana went on at length, "poor mother, worn out from grief and worry, followed him a few

months later. So I was left alone—and penniless—"

"Ah-h! But what was the matter with great aunt Sarah?" His tone was more curious than sympathetic. "Surely she came to the rescue?"

"Oh, no, indeed, Phil! She had fallen out with father years and years ago, and we never heard from her. But at last I was able to get a fairly good position, so I struggled along. And when Aunt Sarah died, it was found that she hadn't made a will—and as I was the only relative, I fell heir to her little fortune."

"Darned lucky, what?" Phil commented.

"Yes, indeed! And the very first thing I did"—her face brightened and she glanced pridefully about her—"the very first thing was to buy this ducky bungalow. I was *so* anxious to have a home again! Miss Ross lives with me. Maybe you remember her, Phil—my old Latin teacher. She was just worn out from living in stuffy little rooms and apartments, and she's as happy as can be here."

"H-m-m-m!" Phil cast a speculative glance around him. "Well, I guess the house is all right—and I suppose the rest of your money is soundly invested?"

"Oh, yes, it's in good railroad bonds and such things as that." Mariana voiced all women's vagueness about financial matters.

"Well, I'm not so fortunately supplied with filthy lucre myself." Philip's short laugh held an envious tone. "As I said before, money never seems to stick to me very long. I've made very decent salaries in all my jobs, but—oh, well, a man lives only once, you know, and in the tropics one learns not to take thought for the morrow. But I've had some great times," with an expansive sweep of the cigarette in his thin, bloodless fingers, and a reminiscent smile quirking the corners of his mouth. "Some *great* times, Mariana! Pleasure is the chief end of man, south of the Rio Grande!"

"But—but, Phil—" she began doubtfully.

"Now spare the preachments, my dear. Nothing bores me so quickly as a reformer. Of course, when I become a happy Benedict, my freedom may be slightly curtailed, but after all, marriage isn't taken so seriously nowadays, thank the Lord!"

With the tip of the slender cane he was whipping off the roses that hung within his reach along the rustic arbor. Soon the stemless crimson blossoms lay in a semicircle around the marble bench, like gory heads around an executioner's block in medieval times.

"Oh! You're going to be married soon, Phil?" Mariana's face lighted up. Her tenseness of body relaxed, and a faint color returned to her cheeks and lips.

"Why, of course, darling," he laughed, with a look out of the corner of his eye. "That's what I want to talk to you about. We are both going to be married—soon!"

"Why—why—Phil—" she faltered, while the tinge of color deepened to a painful blush.

"Mariana, surely you remember our last sad meeting?" His tone was light and laughing, but the girl shivered as he spoke. "We met to say good-by. Don't you recall your solemn promise to marry me when I should return?"

"But—but—" Her rosy color ebbed and the brown eyes looked enormous.

"Of course, I was away longer than we anticipated, but that does not release you from your vows, my dear!"

"Phil!" she cried, "you've been

away for four whole years! And after the first we didn't even correspond!"

"Oh, well, Mariana, I was very busy—and anyway, in a long absence, one just naturally neglects writing—"

"You neglected it because you forgot all about me," she interrupted decisively. "And I was not sorry, for by that time I'd begun to realize we should never marry. My mother and father were perfectly right when they objected to our engagement!"

"Yes, your parents were always prejudiced against me," he acknowledged easily. "They disapproved of certain boyish escapades, though these were no worse than every red-blooded young scapegrace experiences. But that doesn't matter now."

"Doesn't matter?"

"Certainly not, Mariana. One can't go through life handicapped by the old-fashioned ideas of a past generation. One must live according to modern standards."

"Philip Curtis, do you think for one minute that I would now go contrary to their wishes—"

"Certainly! You don't expect to renig on your promise to me, do you? You can't do that, you know!"

MARIANA gave him a sidewise glance. Yes, he was really in earnest! His lips were compressed into a thin line; his narrowed lids betrayed a cruel gleam. She thought of Pat's green eyes when he was tempted by Caruso's nearness. But, of course, that was absurd: a man could not frighten a girl into marriage—not nowadays!

"You're talking nonsense!" She opposed his determined look with outward bravery. "No girl would marry a man she hadn't even written to for four years! Be yourself, Phil!"

"Well, dearest, if it's my neglect that's bothering you, I can persuade you to forgive and forget." He seized both her hands in a firm grasp and tried to draw her toward him. Mariana resisted with all her strength. As she twisted her hands in his, something hard and pointed dug into his palm. He half released his clasp, and discovered a slim platinum ring, with a modest diamond in an elaborate setting. The ring was on the third finger of the girl's left hand.

"Aha!" A frown drew his dark brows almost together; the eyes narrowed; the lip curled in a venomous smile. "Now I see the reason for this coy reluctance! The unfaithful sweetheart has another suitor! Well, you can just cast him into the discard, my dear Mariana, and renew your affection for your first love again!"

"I will do nothing of the kind," she retorted with spirit.

"No?" he inquired softly. "I'm sorry to appear abrupt in such a delicate matter, but you must remember that I have a prior claim."

"Phil!" she cried in awakening terror. "Surely, if you ever loved me, you wouldn't ruin my happiness now! Our foolish girl-and-boy affair was ended long ago. Please go and leave me!"

"Nothin' doin'! You promised to marry me—you made that promise in black and white in these very letters here," producing them from his pocket. "You see, I've treasured them all these years. You agreed to wait, no matter how long it might be. And a first engagement, Mariana, is like a first mortgage—always given precedence over a second."

"But, Phil," she implored, nervously twisting the ring round and round upon the slender finger, "surely you

wouldn't want me to marry you, when you know I am in love with—David! He's a surgeon, just beginning to build up a splendid reputation. He's had debts to pay, and his mother was ill for a long, long time. He couldn't get anything ahead, and we couldn't afford to be married. So Aunt Sarah's money was a godsend—"

"Money is always a godsend!" Phil laughed unpleasantly.

Just then Pat, the orange-colored Persian, advanced to the rose arbor with a stately tread, and sprang upon Mariana's knee. He gently reached out an investigating nose toward the visitor, and then stepped daintily across the intervening space of marble bench. Phil watched his movements with a malicious grin; and just as Pat, in trusting friendliness, rubbed a shaggy head against his arm, he touched the cat's nose with the glowing tip of his cigarette. Pat hissed furiously and jumped to the ground. Then, with an air of insulted dignity, he retreated to the terrace.

"Yes, money is always a godsend," Phil repeated decisively, unmindful of Mariana's indignant gasp. "And you may as well ditch this doctor chap right now, Mariana, or else—" He paused, with a meaning look into her distressed face.

"I'll do nothing of the kind!"

"No?" His tone was soft and silky. "Well, I really didn't take you to be the sort of girl who'd enjoy the publicity of a courtroom in a spicy breach of promise suit, but of course, if you insist—"

"Phil!"

"Absolutely, Mariana! I've got the goods on you right here!" indicating the little packet of letters with a careless hand. "No doubt your new lover will be delighted when he hears these touching sentiments read to a jury — especially this! Providence must have inspired me to keep it!" He drew a letter from its envelope and smoothed the pages thoughtfully.

"Wh-what is it, Phil?"

"Well, my dear, in this you speak of a little trip which we enjoyed together. I'm sure you will recall it. We drove to San Diego for a three-day visit!"

"Philip Curtis! I stayed with Virginia Downing while you went on a business trip to Tia Juana. You stopped for me on your way home! My mother and father knew all about it!" The girl's smooth young face was white and drawn; her brown eyes flashed.

"All very true, my dear," he chuckled. "But what proof could you produce? Your parents are not here to testify for you. Your friend has married and is traveling with her husband in the wilderness of Asia, as I have taken pains to learn. And your letter—shall I read it to you? It is really a very damaging piece of evidence, because it fails to mention the facts you've just explained. No, you can't have it in your hands, Mariana, but you shall hear it. Let's see. . . . Ah, yes, here you are:

> "Phil dearest, I'm so lonely to-night. I keep thinking it was just two months ago to-day when we made that heavenly trip to San Diego. Weren't we happy then? And those three perfect days in that beautiful city! But now it all seems like a wonderful dream. Do you remember the moonlight on the ocean as we drove back? The moonlight makes me cry now, darling—I do miss you so!"

With a smile he folded the letter, in its round, schoolgirlish handwriting, placed it in the packet with perhaps a

dozen others, and returned them all to the breast pocket of his coat. Then he spoke, in a soft, purring voice.

"Wouldn't a jury love a bit of spice like that? Wouldn't the dear public just eat it up? Newspaper reporters are always ravenous for such tidbits. Of course it might not make a big hit with your new lover, but I'm sure he'd be deeply interested. And since he's an ambitious young surgeon, hoping to gain general favor—well, he might not think it advisable to become mixed up in such a scandal. I doubt if he'd care to marry a sophisticated little adventuress like you!"

The girl sat pale and silent, a slender figure of tragedy, in the perfumed shadows of the rose arbor. Her staring gaze was fixed upon the little house which she had dreamed of as a romantic setting for her honeymoon.

Philip toyed with his slender cane and eyed her in smiling triumph. At last he rose, and with a mocking bow, murmured:

"Well, my dear, the case is stated. Perhaps we'd best adjourn our pleasant conference now? I wouldn't for the world wear my welcome out too soon! Besides, you need some time to realize your position. I'll give you three days—on the third day you either marry me or I start suit for breach of promise! Until we meet again, my dear!"

He sauntered out to the curb, sprang into a low, rakish, yellow roadster and sped away.

PHILIP'S departure seemed to leave an evil spell hanging over the bright little house that was meant to be so happy. For a long time Mariana sat on the hard bench, gazing at the beheaded roses wilting on the grass. At last she wandered indoors to the cool and shadowy living room. She sank down in the wing chair by the fireplace, and dully watched Pat as he slapped a furry paw at the silken rosy curtains swaying gently above the cushioned window seat. Unfeelingly she listened while Caruso on the terrace lifted his voice in clear, sweet melody. At length she tried to busy herself with a little unnecessary dusting, and with a half-hearted re-arranging of her books and music. Then, in the kitchen, she prepared a salad for dinner. But she could not keep herself at a definite task for long.

She wandered into the airy, prim little bedroom occupied by her friend, Miss Ross. The bed was made up and counterpaned with nice precision. The apple-green spread hung its rounded scallops in a perfectly even line. The pillows were arranged with meticulous care. The floor was polished and shining, and the rugs were hopelessly clean. There was nothing to do here. Mariana sighed and went on to her own bedroom.

There she began to trifle with a few odds and ends of collars, ribbons and handkerchiefs among the scented pads of the chiffonier drawers. And then her self-control gave way—for, as she bent to tuck a wispy scarf into the lacquered box where it belonged, her eyes encountered her fiancé's own frank gaze in a kodak picture which she had snapped one day at the beach. She had caught him at his laughing best; he looked just a delightful grown up little boy, his blond head thrown back, his vigorous bare arms raised in the act of hurling a beach ball.

Mariana was touchingly proud of the serious, intellectual photograph of David which hung, beautifully framed, in her living room, but she loved this little snapshot.

Now, as she clutched it tightly in her hands, hot tears streamed down her face and splashed on the polished surface of the little lacquered box. Blindly she drew her arm across her eyes; then, turning to the bed, she threw herself down on its comforting expanse and buried her head in the pillow.

For a long black hour she lay there, a prey to fear and foreboding. She tossed and turned and beat her hands helplessly upon the pillows, and wept until she was forced to stop from very weariness. At last she lay still, her burning eyelids closed. The minutes passed, slowly measured by the ticking of the little clock on the chiffonier.

At length she became aware of a cool, moist touch on her hand that hung listlessly over the bedside. A furry paw reached up and gave a gentle tug at her sleeve. Then Pat jumped up beside her and flicked her cheek with a rough, caressing tongue.

She sat up, rubbed her eyes and caught him to her in an impulsive hug, and, with a loud ecstatic purring, he closed his green eyes for a nap. But Mariana suddenly put him down and struggled to her feet. Then she gasped at the sight of her ravaged countenance in the mirror. She hastened to the bathroom, splashed cold water over her flushed face, and applied powder lavishly in a brave attempt to dispel the traces of her weeping.

Returning to the bedroom, she noticed that the little timepiece pointed to two o'clock. Well, she couldn't eat a bite of lunch, but maybe a cup of tea would be a bracer for her nerves. She went on to the blue and yellow kitchen with Pat at her heels.

A few minutes later she sat gloomily at the little gate-leg table by the window, with a cup of tea standing untasted before her, while the cat lunched with enthusiasm from a clean newspaper spread on the floor. A timid knocking sounded at the entrance of the service porch. Mariana wearily answered the summons.

"Es thees Mees Winters, please?" The slow, hesitant words were liquefied into music by the soft Spanish inflection. Mariana stared in dull surprise at the dark beauty of the girl who stood there, nervously clasping and unclasping her brown hands.

"What glorious black eyes and long curved lashes!" was Mariana's first thought. "Her cheeks are like an Indian peach!" Aloud she said soberly, "I am Miss Winters."

"Señorita, I—I—" The words came haltingly. The girl twisted a wisp of handkerchief in her fingers and looked up shyly. "Señorita, I am looking for—for a place to work. Maybe you want maid, cook, housekeep' — anything, señorita?" flinging out imploring slender hands.

"You—you are looking for work?" Mariana echoed incredulously. "Why, I wouldn't suppose — I mean I shouldn't have thought—you surely haven't been long in service?"

A slow red stained the dark cheek with a deeper tinge of color. The long black eyes behind their fringe of curving lashes turned away from the other's gaze.

"I—I tell the truth, señorita. I haf' nevair been—I am not—but I vera good cook, housekeep', maid, señorita," she amended hastily. "I work for you—"

"We-ll, I don't know." Mariana's tone was dubious. "I *have* been thinking of a maid, but I should want one who is well trained and with good references."

The girl's eyes fell. She plucked

nervously at a fold of her dusty black skirt, and scuffed one slim tan pump against the other. "Señorita, let me stay," she begged. "I—I need work—see!" Dramatically she flung open a small worn purse to display its emptiness. "Not a peseta—a penny, señorita! I haf' no place to go in all thees beeg city!" With an upward glance of the liquid dark eyes: "I—I not eat since yesterday, señorita!"

"You poor child! Come into the kitchen. I'll fix a lunch for you!" said Mariana, with pity in her voice.

"Thanks, gracious lady—you vera kind!" The girl's voice was a bit husky from fatigue. She sank down tiredly in a chair by the gate-leg table and watched Mariana's swift raid on pantry and ice box. She ate very little, but a fresh cup of tea seemed to renew the vitality of the slim young body. Mariana sat at the other side of the table and regarded her thoughtfully. By what strange freak of Fate had this attractive little waif drifted to her door?

"What is your name, child?" she asked kindly.

"I am Dolores Fernandez, señorita.

"Mariana! Darling! You're hurt—you're wounded! Speak to me!"

I—I have come all the way from—from Nogales."

"And your family?"

"I—I am poor orphan girl, señorita. My mother long dead; my father, he die three, four months ago—" The big eyes misted darkly.

"And you have no relatives nor friends to help you?"

"No, no, señorita! My father, he have land an' money once—he send me to convent school—but everything gone now, los' in silver mine that was no good. An' my lover—ah, Mother of

God!" The black eyes flashed wildly and the slim hands beat her breast. "I theenk he marry me, but he—he has lef' me, señorita—lef' me for his Amurrican sweetheart!" Her intense gaze sent a little shiver through Mariana's veins. "Me—I fin' him one day, an' then Dolores shall be r-r-revenge'! I keel him—keel him!" The brown hands clenched and the poppy-red lips clamped into a narrow line. Mariana drew back involuntarily.

"Why—why, Dolores—" she stammered.

"Ah, pardon, pardon, gracious lady! Dolores forget herself—jus' talking wild, señorita! Don't remember it any more! Forgive!"

"Dolores, you make my blood run cold! I hope you won't remember it any more! But you're tired and unhappy, poor child. No wonder you talk wildly." She studied the dusky oval face, the full bloom of the lips, the thick black curls bound by a ribbon at the nape of the slender neck. "Tell me, how did you happen to come *here?*"

"I—I been looking everywhere." The black eyes were downcast; they would not meet Mariana's gaze; the slim fingers nervously twisted the limp handkerchief. "I look all down thees street, an' lady tell me maybe you want maid—"

"I wonder who the lady was?" Mariana reflected. "But I suppose gossip travels fast, even in a big city like this—" And her heart contracted with a sudden terror of her own. "Poor friendless little thing," she thought, "she's only a child, really, and the world is so full of dangers for an unprotected girl!"

"Señorita," Dolores broke in beseechingly upon her painful reflections, "please say that I may stay with you! Gracious lady"—she threw herself upon her knees and snatched Mariana's hands in her own slender grasp—"be kind to poor Dolores! Ef you turn her away, what is lef' her but to jump into the sea?"

"Oh, no, no! You mustn't think of—that! I'll tell you, Dolores, you may stay with me for the present, at least. I can't turn you out penniless and alone. I'll do what I can for you!"

"Ah, thanks! Thanks, señorita! You vera, vera kind!" Dolores kissed the captive hand, to Mariana's great embarrassment. "You are angel of mercy to me! You not be sorry."

"I hope not, Dolores!" Mariana began to realize how rash she had been. "I'm sure I hope not. But I know how a girl may be so dazed by trouble that she doesn't know where to turn. But come, Dolores. I'll show you the little room you can have. You haven't any luggage?"

"No, señorita! When I fin' my lover has lef' me, I run away—I walk an' walk, an' sometimes I get rides, an' some kind persons give me food, an' at last I come to thees beeg city!"

"How old are you, Dolores? About seventeen?"

"*Sí*, señorita, seventeen las' month." The white teeth flashed in a rare smile as she followed through the little hall and into the back bedroom.

The need for practical action was a tonic for Mariana's depression. She busily sorted out garments in the chiffonier drawer. "You'll have to wear these things of mine till we can get you others. And the first thing will be a hot bath, and then a good long nap, for you're tired out—and no wonder."

"Thanks, señorita. You are angel from Heaven!" Dolores murmured submissively. With a deft wriggle she slipped out of the dusty black dress,

accepted the armful of white and pink which Mariana extended and disappeared into the bathroom.

LATER, just after, bathed and refreshed, the girl had fallen asleep, three crisp peals of the doorbell resounded through the house.

Mariana gasped in dismay, for much as she loved David she did not feel equal to seeing him just then. Her thoughts were too confused; she did not know what to confide in him, what to conceal.

But at the first sight of the tall blond young man on her doorstep, a flood of tenderness rushed to her heart. It was a reassurance just to see his athletic figure with its air of quiet strength and poise. His lean, tanned face, usually serious and composed, lighted up with a brilliant smile as she opened the door.

"Oh, David, I'm so glad it's you!"

"Who else might it be, false one?" he laughed, catching her up in his arms for a swift kiss. "Run put on your bonnet, Mariana! I have a call to make in Midvale. Want to come along?"

"I'd love to go!" she said eagerly. "Ready in half a minute, dear!"

She ran to her room, pulled a little green sports hat down over the short brown curls, dusted a powder puff on her tip-tilted nose, snatched up a green leather hand bag, and started for the front door. Then she paused, wavered a moment, and slipped back through the hall to the little bedroom. Dolores was sound asleep, one brown arm flung across her face, the black hair spread out over the pillow. Mariana breathed a thankful sigh and hurried out to the curb.

"What you been doing to-day, honey?" he asked, giving her a keen professional glance. "Don't you feel well?"

"Oh, yes, I'm all right, dear. Just a little tired." She was always loth to admit even the slightest ailment to David, for he would instantly become the physician. Now she forced a smile and tried to seem her usual self.

"Tired? Been overdoing—trying to find a few specks of dust in that doll's house of yours?"

"Oh, I haven't been doing so much—"

"No? Only sweeping and dusting and mopping and cooking—"

"Only the little bit of housekeeping necessary for Miss Ross and me," she murmured.

"Yes, but you see, dear, you were run down even before you bought the house. You ought to get a maid and rest until you get your strength back."

"A—a—maid?" she repeated vaguely, but with a smile lurking in the brown eyes. "You mean—a maid, David?"

"Certainly, I mean a maid! Nothing else but!" he retorted. "You'd better look around—ask your friends. One of them must know of some sensible middle-aged woman—"

"How about a cute Jap boy, dearest?" very demurely. "Don't you think—"

"No!" His tone was emphatic. "Stick to an American, honey. Don't try any experiments!"

"We-ll, I'll see about it, David. Of course there's no particular hurry—"

"The sooner the better, Mariana. It's only a month now until the great day, and I don't want to see a poor, fagged little ghost come creeping down the aisle to meet me at the altar." He slipped an arm about her.

Mariana laughed, but a stab of fear struck at her heart. "Only a month!" she thought. "*But what about Phil?* Shall I tell David? Oh, no, no, I can't!

There must be some way out, but how am I to find it? Would David believe me? Was Phil always so cruel, so merciless, I wonder? I used to think he was ideal. But he never was sweet and good-tempered and high-principled, like David.

"And even if David stands by me"—her tortured thoughts kept running round and round—"still there's Phil's threat of the courts. People love to think the worst! I couldn't marry David—it would ruin his career. We never could be happy—all our lives, we'd remember!" And through all her dismal reflections ran the endless refrain, "Three days . . . Three days!"

"My dear, are you suffering from deafness to-day?" David teasingly broke in upon her painful abstraction. "Or do you just naturally prefer your own thoughts to mine? I have asked you the same question three times."

Mariana rested her weary head against his shoulder for a blessed moment of relaxation.

"I was just dreaming, I guess," she murmured. "David, do you know what a darling you are? I'm glad some other girl didn't get you!"

"Well, you needn't ever worry about any competition, honey," he said, his hand closing warmly over hers. "That's what makes our love so perfect—our confidence in each other. We're as sure of our trust and affection as we are of the sun up there."

But Mariana shivered a little as she sat alone in the car while he visited his patient.

WHEN David drove her home he came in to stay for dinner. Miss Ross was home, and he immediately engaged her in a lively argument. He always enjoyed a wordy battle with that white-haired, keen-eyed and worldly-wise lady. Her flashing wit delighted him. They quarreled about every possible topic, yet held the very highest opinion of each other.

Mariana sank down in the nearest chair and listened in amused silence. This time, the discussion centered on the difference between heredity and environment. Terms totally unfamiliar to Mariana were hurled about recklessly. The air was thick with "genes," "hormones," "Mendelian laws," and cryptic references to certain "Jukeses" of deplorable family history.

"I tell you, Miss Ross"—David was intensely serious—"what is born in a human being will always come out under the right influence. The old saw, 'What's bred in the bone—'"

"There is truth in the old saying—I grant you that, Dr. Austin." Miss Ross was ever tactful. "But you must admit that environment molds character. When the mind of a child is exposed to a wrong conception of life, it is inevitably warped—"

The curtained glass doors of the dining room were quietly opened. Miss Ross paused in mid-sentence, her mouth ajar. David stared in amazed silence. A pretty, dark-eyed girl stood in the doorway, dressed in simple white, her black curls topped by a perky little cap. How was any one to know that the cap was made of two lacy handkerchiefs, hastily pinned together?

"Dinner is served, señorita." Her voice was low and dulcet in the sudden hush.

Mariana arose and smilingly waved the debaters into the dining room

"Miss Ross — David, how do you like my little surprise?" she laughed.

"This is Dolores, who has come to live with us."

"Mariana!" David exclaimed. "Then you were fooling me this afternoon! You'd already found a maid!"

"Where did you get such a pretty one?" asked Miss Ross in an aside.

"Oh, I flatter myself that I'm a good picker," said Mariana airily. "I always choose the very highest type—of friend, fiancé, or maid!"

Dolores, who had disappeared kitchenward, returned with three bowls of clear hot bouillon on her tray. The dinner progressed smoothly to the final happy moment of angel food and frozen pudding. The talk was necessarily guarded in the presence of the pretty maid, and Mariana enjoyed her little mystery so much that she warded off all surmises until they went back to the living room.

"Now, Mariana, there's something of a mystery about our comic opera maid." Miss Ross settled herself on the davenport and folded her plump arms in a judicial attitude. "Let's hear the whole story!"

"Yes, out with it, honey!" David stretched his tall frame out in the big armchair. "I don't exactly fancy the idea of that little Spanish volcano in our home, darling—she's likely to slip some poison into the soup any day!"

"Nonsense, David!" Mariana was quick to defend her protégée. "She—she's just a poor orphan child, who appealed to me for help."

"Yeah?" skeptically.

"She told me so herself!"

"Well, that settles it!" David's tone was still ironical. "And she has good references, of course?"

"W-e-l-l—"

"Why, Mariana!" Miss Ross was frankly incredulous. "Surely you didn't—"

"Yes, I did! I couldn't turn a hungry, homeless girl out into the streets! She told me how her father lost his money in a mine, and then he died—"

"Oh, yes, the regular hokum," nodded David. "My child, your tender heart does you credit, but just the same, you're running too great a risk in taking in a strange girl like that."

"But—but, David"—Mariana was almost in tears—"the poor thing's lover has jilted her! She is heartbroken over it!"

"That may be true, but it only makes your plan still less wise," he soberly retorted.

"Well, my only fear is that, since Dolores is so very attractive, she may decide to test her powers as a vamp on you, my dear!" laughed Mariana.

"No chance of that!" He smiled, but he was not to be turned aside by a jest. "I keep my distance where Mexican girls are concerned. It isn't healthy for a white man to fool around them very much—it's safer to meddle with dynamite!"

"Oh, David!"

"It's true, my dear. I'd sooner face a dozen Reds, or Chicago gangsters, than your one little slip of a girl with a grudge—and a knife!"

"That leaning of the Southern races to the use of the dagger," put in Miss Ross triumphantly, "goes to prove my claim that environment molds character. These peoples are reared amid scenes of violence and revenge—"

"I can't agree with you there, Miss Ross," David instantly met the issue. "The Latin races are partial to the knife because it fits the need of their naturally passionate natures. In my opinion—"

"Their natures become passionate under the influence of their surroundings," opposed his adversary firmly.

"They have suffered so much wrong and oppression. An innocent little Mexican child—"

"Is a regular little firebrand," said David, grinning.

"Oh, dear, they're at it again," Mariana groaned. "Well, I'll just slip out and see how Dolores is getting along with the dishes."

A little later she returned to the living room, followed by Dolores bearing a silver tray with three tall crystal glasses of iced orange juice.

"I thought you might need cooling off after such a warm argument," Mariana laughed as she settled down in a little low chair close to David's big one.

"Oh, our debates are like fireworks — lots of noise and brilliance, but very little heat," said he, accepting a frosted glass from the tray.

"Sometimes we're like Fourth of July orators," Miss Ross admitted thoughtfully. "The less knowledge, the more hot air! Mariana, I know you won't mind," she added, smiling, "if I take this orange juice to my room. I have some reports that must be finished this evening. So good night, Dr. Austin." Then, pausing in the doorway, she asked mischievously: "Do you really think the love of argument is an *innate* tendency in us both?"

"We seem to be natural self-starters, anyway!" David dearly loved the last word. "It takes only a spark to set us off! Good night, Miss Ross—and pleasant environments in your dreams!"

Miss Ross laughed and vanished. David set down his empty glass and turned to the girl.

"Dear, I really must protest against your keeping that pretty little trouble-maker here. Better let me look up some institution for girls—"

"Oh, David, how can you be so hard-hearted and suspicious? I'm sure she's just what she claims to be, a poor homeless creature, whom some wicked man has cruelly jilted—"

"But, Mariana, I'll be worried about you. No telling what dangers you may be running! There's a wild look in those big black eyes of hers—"

The telephone rang, and Mariana hastened to answer.

"Dr. Austin? Yes, he's here," with an exasperated glance at David. "Now, darling, you'll probably have to go to that old hospital or somewhere!" She handed him the instrument.

A moment's pause; then David's. "Yes . . . Yes . . . All right . . . In ten minutes." And Mariana knew her evening was over.

"Sorry, dear, I must hurry! You'd better pile into bed pretty soon, and get a good night's rest Call me if anything's wrong. See you some time tomorrow, darling!"

A close embrace, a brief kiss, and he was gone. Mariana, left alone, began to realize that she was terribly fatigued, in body and mind, after her trying days; so she dutifully followed her physician's advice and was in bed by ten o'clock.

BUT sleep was slow in coming. Through the long hours of that wretched night, she vainly tried to concentrate her thoughts on the unsolvable problem which she must find a way to solve. But there was no solution. For hours she tossed uneasily, dropping at last into a troubled slumber, only to be tormented by fearful dreams, in which she was threatened by unknown evils and vague enemies. Once, Phil's shifty eyes and cruel lips leered at her as she fought against his greedy arms. Once it seemed that

Dolores, the pretty maid of tragic possibilities, was standing silently at her bedside—a slim young figure wrapped in gauzy white that made a ghostly foil for the black cloud of flying hair, the dim pale face, the lightning flash of wild dark eyes—an unearthly specter revealed by the pallid moonlight.

Still held prisoner in the borderland of sleep, Mariana moaned and gasped in a painful whisper, "David! David! Help me! Save me! I—can't—"

Then she fancied that the slim white figure bent forward quickly at the sound of David's name, and that the wild black eyes searched her face for a long, breathless moment! Was that slender hand clenched on something slim and bright and sinister, against the whiteness of the ghostly breast?

But as suddenly as it had appeared, the apparition vanished from her sight, and Mariana was wide awake, with a cold dew on her forehead and a deadly chill at her heart.

At daybreak she fell into the deep sleep of utter exhaustion, and did not return to consciousness until the hands of her little boudoir clock pointed to eleven. She arose wearily, tubbed and dressed, and then sat listless and unsmiling at the dainty table in her jade and apricot dining room. A demure and respectful Dolores served her with toast and fruit and fresh drip coffee. But Mariana was not hungry. She drained her cup, pushed it away, and still sat there absently crumbling bits of toast in nervous fingers, while Pat reached up a gentle paw in delicate reproach for her neglect, and Caruso trilled cheerfully at the casement.

"Mees Ross," Dolores volunteered shyly, "she breakfas' long ago an' gone to her school. She say tell you she not be home for dinner this evening."

"Oh, yes," Mariana remembered. "Sure enough—there's some kind of faculty spread to-night. She wouldn't miss it for anything."

With a light, easy grace, Dolores moved about the dining room. She dusted and polished and tidied thoroughly, but always with the air of a princess in masquerade. Mariana, watching her, smiled at the dim remembrance of her ghost-haunted dreams, and reflected that the girl's presence did much to relieve her present loneliness and dread. "I'm going to keep her with me," she thought warmly; then, amending the resolution with a shudder:

"That is — providing — oh, what shall I tell Phil?"

"Telephone, señorita," announced the maid, with her soft Spanish inflection. "Dr. David Austin calling."

Mariana instantly brightened. At the little telephone table in the living room she murmured eagerly, "Hello, darling!"

"How you feeling, dearest?" Her lover's voice came with reassuring power and tenderness over the wire. "All right? That's good! I thought last night you were looking rather seedy. I called an hour or so ago, but your pretty little package of TNT told me you weren't up yet!"

"I slept late—I'm disgracefully lazy to-day," she confessed. "But I'm quite all right, dear."

"Glad to hear it, hon—it relieves my mind. I must hurry over to the hospital now—three operations slated for to-day. Be with you this evening, if I have any luck!"

"Yes, David. Come for dinner. *Au revoir!*" she answered lightly, and put down the instrument.

The postman's whistle sounded at the door.

It was a special; a thin white enve-

lope with a handwriting that looked vaguely familiar. Mariana puzzled over it as she ripped it open. She drew out a small paper, folded once. Inside, a short message was scrawled. It said, "Lest you forget. Phil."

Mariana stood in the middle of the floor, the paper crumpled in her hand. Her eyes were staring, her lips were white. She had almost come to hope that Phil's threats were only a terrible dream which she could not quite shake off. But this message, frightening in its very brevity, caught her up sharply to realization of her danger. Her heart grew sick within her. She turned blindly to the window, where Caruso swung in his vermilion cage and piped his tuneless melodies. She leaned her head against the casement, gazing dully out across the lawn. The rose arbor was shaded by a crimson cloud of blossoms.

But Mariana remembered all those buds of yesterday, which still lay withered on the grass, mute and scentless victims of Phil's cruelty.

Her pain-clouded eyes turned back to Caruso, swinging in his cage. For a long time she stood watching the pulsing of his yellow throat as he trilled his gay cadenzas. Then: "I know what I'll do, Caruso," she meditated slowly, and a deep relief filled her heart. "This evening, after dinner, I'll tell David all about it—the whole story—and he will know how to deal with that dreadful man. Maybe he'll be angry, but anyway he must be told. It wouldn't be right to keep it from him any longer. And then—I must give him his freedom. I couldn't drag him into this horrible mix-up. Oh, it's all too hideous to think about! I must do something to take my mind off it, or I'll go crazy!"

Like a streak of orange flame, Pat came tearing through the room, with Dolores in laughing pursuit.

"I—I go to tie hees ribbon with the little bell, señorita," she explained, with a flash of white teeth between the full red lips, "an' Pat, he snatch the ribbon in hees mouth an' run away! He likes to have a game, señorita!"

But, having successfully achieved the spotlight and gained the attention of his audience, Pat suddenly abandoned his kittenish rôle and resumed his mislaid dignity as a haughty Persian aristocrat. He sat himself down beside Mariana, sedately wrapping his fluffy tail around his feet, and casting a round green eye at Caruso swinging above his head. With a stealthy grace almost equal to his own, Dolores swooped upon him. She carried him to the davenport, plumped his furry softness down upon the cushions, and kneeling on the rug before him, she triumphantly tied the green ribbon round his neck, with the little silver bell dangling under his chin.

Mariana had to smile. She thought, "I must put in these long hours some way until David comes this evening—why not do some shopping? I can get some pretty clothes for Dolores. She looks just too cunning in a frilly cap and apron. But I must get things that won't look too 'maid-y'—she's so pretty—it would be a shame to make her just a servant! I want her to be more of a companion. David was probably right about her fiery nature, but she's just as quick to love as she is to hate. I'll adore having her here!"

Aloud she said, "Dolores, I'm going down town in a few minutes. You and Pat can keep house this afternoon. And we'd better decide now about dinner. Dr. Austin will be here—what shall we have?" She wrinkled her forehead reflectively, and then went

on, "Oh, I know! He's very fond of chicken patties, with green peas, and there might be a salad of avocado with tomatoes—and—what else, Dolores? An orange frappé?"

"*Sí*, señorita, with the little coconut cakes?"

"Yes, that will be nice, and whatever else you think of, Dolores. I must go and dress now. I'm so glad you know how to do things!"

"*Sí*, señorita, I—I learn at the convent school!"

"You're a treasure, Dolores! I'll bring you something pretty when I come home!"

Presently Mariana, in a smart sports suit, with the green hat pulled down over her curls, and the green purse in her hand, stood at her front door, in the bright afternoon sunshine. As she lingered a moment, with a parting word for Dolores in the hall, her glance was caught by the strange behavior of a low rakish yellow roadster which was just passing by. The car was driven very queerly, she thought, lurching from one side of the street to the other in a staggering way as if an erratic or reckless hand were at the wheel. Then she gasped and paled, and her fingers tightened around the purse. *Was that Phil?* The gray hat with its turned-down brim concealed the upper part of the driver's face, but his general appearance was familiar, and she fancied that he turned to stare and gesture toward the rose-colored bungalow as the car lurched on.

Mariana leaned against the door jamb for a minute, with the feeling that she could not possibly go on. Then she straightened herself proudly, with a stony, set look on her uplifted face. She drew forth the ever ready compact, skillfully wielded a lipstick by the aid of a tiny mirror, set the green hat at a jauntier angle, and gently closed the door behind her.

THAT evening, just as the round, squat mahogany clock on the buffet chimed the hour of seven, Mariana entered her bright dining room with a bowl of nodding, long-stemmed crimson roses in her hands. She looked like a pale virginal bud herself, in a filmy sheath of green georgette. With particular care she placed the bowl exactly in the center of the dining table, under the shaded amber lights. Her fingers strayed for a moment over the lacy cloth and among the crystal glasses and the shining silver. Everything was perfect, she decided; the table had never looked prettier.

She wandered on to the living room and paused before the telephone table, where a frameless plate glass mirror hung on the wall above. The mirror reflected a rosy pool of light around the bridge lamp, and the rose-and-gold-flowered draperies at the casements. But Mariana was not studying the decorative scheme of her room. She was inspecting her own appearance, with a keen eye for any possible defects which might be remedied before David should arrive. She heard Dolores in the kitchen, chattering in her little-girl way, with many soft Spanish phrases, to Pat, who was mildly excited by the prospect of chicken for his dinner. Mariana smiled, carefully tucked an obstinate brown curl in place, and smoothed a curving eyebrow. As she turned away from the mirror, the doorbell sounded three sharp peals.

"David's rather early, after all," she rejoiced. Hastening through the little hall, she flung the front door wide open. "Come right on in, dearest!"

Her greeting was never finished. She started back in alarm as Philip Curtis, hat in hand, swaggered unsteadily into the hall.

"Ah, Mariana, my dear!" He bowed with exaggerated ceremony. "Glad to receive such a warm welcome on this — er — ah — impromptu visit. I knew you'd come to your senses pretty soon. You're—hic—lookin' gran' to-night, perfectly gran', m' dear!"

"Phil!" she gasped, shrinking back as he advanced.

"Now, now, m' dear, don't be so coy!" He reached out an uncertain hand, only to grasp the air. "I've come to see you on very important business! Jus' think, Mariana—to-morrow's our wedding day!"

"Phil! Keep away from me! You're drunk!"

"Nonsense, nonsense, m' dear! Jus' had a lil drink or two — nothing to speak of! I'm all lit up with happiness—tha's what it is. A man doesn't get married every day in the week, you know!"

Mariana kept retreating, fearfully. She edged along the wall and through the wide arched doorway into the living room. Phil, with his loose lips curled in a grin that was half foolish, half malicious, followed her. He was not too intoxicated to know what he was about, but just enough to intensify the cruel side of his nature. With a sudden lunge he caught her bare arm in a painful grip.

Mariana wrenched herself free. "Don't touch me!" she cried.

"Now, I've had enough of this high an' mighty attitude, m' girl! Try an' talk sense!" His tone was sharp, and his hot eyes seared her face. "I gave you my ultimatum yesterday—marry me, or be sued for breach of promise! To-morrow will be the third day—you should have decided by this time. But I jus' dropped in now to bring a bit of news which may help you to make up your mind. My attorney advises me that I can also bring suit against my rival—the doctor chap, you know—on the charge of alienating your young affections, m' dear!" He eyed Mariana with a sardonic grin.

"Phil Curtis, leave my house this instant! I won't listen to another word!" The girl's heart was sick with fear, but she was trying frantically to bluff her way through. "Go, Phil, while you can! David will be here any minute now—"

"Ah! The true love cometh, eh?" His eyes lighted with an evil gleam. "Well, let him come—just let him come! I'm anxious to meet him!" And he flourished a pistol in the air.

"Phil, if you don't go quietly, I'll call the police!" She moved to the telephone table at the other side of the room.

"Oh, no, you won't, Mariana! We'll not have the cops in on this tender lil love scene! Drop it, Mariana! Drop it, I say!"

She had pushed aside the languorous lady doll whose spreading skirts formed a fluffy screen, and was grasping the telephone in a desperate, shaking hand.

"Mariana!"

She bent her head to the instrument, just as the bark of Phil's pistol reverberated through the house. Mariana stood in frozen calm as the plate glass mirror above the table shattered into a thousand fragments, showered about her shoulders and fell upon the floor. Either he had deliberately fired a little high, with the idea of terrifying her, or else his wavering hand had sped the bullet wildly. Or possibly she owed

her life to the fact that she had bent over the telephone. A sliver of the flying glass had cut her arm and the blood was streaming down, but she was unaware of it. She could not move for fright, but still gripped the instrument in her hand, and stood puzzled.

The crash of the mirror had startled Phil. His hand shook; he had difficulty in taking aim a second time. And suddenly his attention seemed to be distracted. Mariana saw his face whiten to a deathly pallor and his eyes widen in dread as he stared at something that was outside her line of vision. His aim shifted to meet this emergency, but to no avail. A veritable fury of slender white figure and streaming black hair rushed upon him like a whirlwind. In the little fury's upraised hand gleamed something slim and bright and sinister. It flashed on high for an instant—plunged—and Philip, with a slow, gasping, gurgling sigh, dropped to the floor and lay still.

THE world turned black to Mariana. She swayed upon her feet and flung out her arms in blind and speechless agony. Her fingers touched the big armchair David loved, and she grasped at its friendly support as a drowning swimmer clings to a rescuing hand. Presently her mind cleared and she gazed upon the tragedy which even yet her tortured brain could scarcely comprehend.

Phil lay as he had fallen, slumped a little on his side, his head thrown back, his arms flung wide. A dull red stain spread slowly around the hilt of the slender knife that had so swiftly found his heart. A look of astonished wonder was still fixed on the pale, set face and in the dreadful, staring eyes.

Dolores was bending over the prostrate form.

"Ah-h-h! Pheelep Curtis! Villain! Tr-raitor! You would keel the other sweetheart, eh? Eet was not enough that you desert poor loving Dolores—you mus' murder the kin' señorita who love' you not! An' you theenk that Dolores would nevair fin' you! But now your sins haf' foun' you out! An' now—ah, Mother of Mercy—Dolores is revenge'! Die like the dog that you are, Pheelep Curtis! Nevair will you break the heart of poor innocent girl again! But, ah, we did love once!"

With a storm of tears she threw herself upon the unresponsive form, wildly kissing the pale lips and brushing the staring eyes with the dark cloud of her hair.

"Merciful Heaven! What is this?" cried David Austin's stricken voice, as he stood aghast in the open doorway. "Mariana—Mariana! Are you—oh, darling!" as he gathered up her swaying figure in his arms. "You're hurt! You're bleeding! Mariana! Speak to me!"

After an agonizing instant, her eyelids fluttered open. "David!" she whispered. "Oh, David!" Then, with an effort: "I'm—all right—but oh, darling, don't leave me!"

"Of course not, dearest!" He laid her on the davenport and bound the wounded arm with his handkerchief. "It's a nasty jag, but not so very deep. Mariana, how—what's happened?"

"Oh, I remember!" She started up, trembling. "Dolores—Dolores!"

The little Mexican girl was quiet now, crouched on her knees beside the dead man. Then she looked up at tall, blond David Austin.

"I keel heem, señor," she admitted simply. "Dolores is r-r-revenge'!"

David knelt and quickly examined the body. "Died almost instantly!" he muttered to himself.

He cast a keen glance about the room. He noted the revolver lying on the floor just as it had dropped from the relaxed hand. He studied the splinters of the mirror that were scattered about the little table. He regarded Dolores for a long moment in speculative silence. Then he went to the telephone and called a number.

HOURS later, as the hands of the small gilt clock on the mantel pointed to three, David sat beside Mariana on the davenport, thoughtfully watching the blue and yellow flames that chased each other over the logs in the fireplace, and then raced, crackling, up the wide throat of the chimney. The room bore no traces of the recent tragedy, except for a blank space on the wall above the telephone table—and in the center of that space, a tiny, round hole that was scarcely visible, even to the searching eye. The cluster of ceiling lights were not turned on. The dancing flames on the hearth and the rosy pool of color around the bridge lamp left great spaces of the room where eerie shadows played along the walls, swelling to giant size, or dwindling into nothing as the firelight leaped or died.

Pat stretched his tawny length upon the hearthrug, basking in the cheerful warmth and purring sonorously—as David said, he was hitting on all cylinders. Caruso slept in the vermilion cage with his yellow head tucked under his wing. The place seemed steeped in peace and security. The softened lights and wavering shadows cast a glamorous charm about the room; it seemed a little corner of Paradise, where no evil could enter in.

"Mariana, darling."—David's voice was as persuasive as he could make it, and he gently stroked her hand—"this has been a dreadful night for you. But everything is settled, for the present, and you really should go to bed. It's only nervous excitement that is holding you up now, and when the reaction comes—"

"Oh, but, David," she shuddered, "please—please don't go. I couldn't close my eyes—I'd go stark, staring mad—"

"Maybe she could lie down later and get some rest, Dr. Austin," Miss Ross interposed from the wing chair across the hearth. "I know just how she feels—I'm nervous and unstrung myself, and I didn't see it happen. That gruelling we all had to go through was so trying, though the police were as considerate as possible. I wouldn't lie down and close my eyes for anything!"

"W-ell, I admit it would be hard, considering," David agreed. "But here comes Dolores with hot tea—that will brace us up a little. Ah, Dolores—only three cups? Run back, like a good girl, and bring some for yourself. Then we can have a good long talk."

Dolores was looking like a slim, white little wraith now, subdued, large-eyed, serious, but not frightened. She glanced at the doctor to see if he was in earnest. Then she slipped away and returned quickly with her own cup and saucer.

"There's a chair, Dolores," he gestured.

But she shook her head in shy denial, and sank down on the hearthrug, close to Pat. David set his cup down on the low end table. Then, bending forward, with his elbows on his knees and his finger tips pressed judicially together, he reflected soberly:

"Since I have studied over the facts you girls related to the police, I think I have the incredible story fairly well in mind. Your handsome desperado

had made love to Dolores while he was in Mexico, but left her flat when he got ready to come back to the States. Then he tried to bluff—or blackmail—Mariana, on the strength of an old boy-and-girl romance."

"Yes, David, but Phil would never have thought of me again, except for Aunt Sarah's money," Mariana put in.

"Of course, that was his main idea. But what still puzzles me is, how did Dolores happen to drift in here, just at the psychological moment?"

Dolores hung her head shyly at first, then looked up at her little audience pleadingly as she went on with her story: "When Pheelep first come to Assumption—eet is only a leetle village not far from Nogales—he stay at my cousin Rosa's house. Her house, eet is what you call an inn, señor. Pheelep, he help to build a bridge—a very wonderful beeg railroad bridge. I—when my father die, I go to stay weeth cousin Rosa, an' I help her in the house. I see Pheelep there, señor—" The black curls drooped about the oval cheeks and the slim fingers played nervously with a fold of the white dress. "By an' by, he—he tell me that he love me. I—I theenk we marry!" One hand pressed hard against the heaving breast. "An' Rosa, she was glad, because her man, he had job at Tampico, an' Rosa weesh to go there, an' she thought that Pheelep would take me weeth heem. But—but when the beeg bridge, she ees feenesh', then Pheelep go away, señor—without even one good-by to poor Dolores!"

"H-m-m! Yes, there are plenty of that sort!" David muttered.

"An' Rosa, in hees room," the soft voice murmured on; "she fin' papers an' letters an' pictures that he had thrown into the wastebasket, when he was packing up hees things. There was a picture"—she paused a moment and glanced up timidly—"of a girl, an' it was signed, 'Your Mariana.'"

David's sweetheart looked aghast and blushed. "Oh, that fatal picture!" she groaned..

"An' Rosa fin' a newspaper," Dolores continued slowly. "Eet had a piece cut out of eet. So Rosa get another paper to fin' out, an' eet told about Mees Mariana Winters who had heired a fortune an' bought thees house here. So I felt in my heart"—she beat her breast with a vehement hand—"that he had gone to—her. An' I run away, an' I follow heem—"

"And so she came to me," Mariana put in triumphantly. "And she saved my life, David. What if I hadn't allowed her to stay?"

"At first, I—I intend to keel the sweetheart, too," Dolores confessed. "I—I bring dagger. But the señorita, she kind to me—she give me everytheeng, an' she not love Pheelep. So I loved her—I am happy to save her—" The voice faltered and sank into silence.

THOUGHTFULLY David passed his hand over his thick blond hair. "Well, Dolores, all I can say is, you're a very extraordinary girl. One can scarcely tell whether you're to be praised or blamed. Of course we owe you a debt of gratitude that can never be paid! And you've certainly made a big hit with all of us, even that snorting old war horse of a police chief. You'll come out all right, and get a big hand for stopping that second bullet! And when I think of what that skunk was trying to put over—well, you and Mariana are gloriously avenged!"

The girl at David's side relaxed happily against his shoulder. She laid an

impulsive hand on his in a quick caress. David's other hand instantly imprisoned hers, as he said gently, "But the greatest puzzle of all, Mariana, is why you kept all your worry and trouble from me. You suffered all that in silence—*why* didn't you tell me?"

"Oh, David," she shuddered, "if you could only know the agony that I endured. I was afraid to tell you! I felt that you could never love me any more, and I couldn't ruin your life by all the scandal he threatened to make!"

"Of course he could have made it mighty unpleasant for all of us," David admitted, "but if I'd only known—well, Curtis would have got what was coming to him, all right!"

He stared into the flickering yellow flames. A small log fell to pieces, sending out a shower of flying sparks. The tiny crash disturbed Pat's slumbers. He yawned widely, raised his tawny head from the rug, and looked about him with lazy deliberation. Then he arose with dignity, climbed upon Dolores's lap, curled himself into a round, fluffy ball, and went to sleep again.

Miss Ross nodded in the big wing chair. Propping her eyelids open by a valiant effort of will, she remarked drowsily, "Dr. Austin, somebody's theory was vindicated here this evening! Either an innate impulse was aroused by the right stimulus, or early environment produced the usual results. Which of us was right?"

David smiled. "Maybe both of us, Miss Ross. At any rate, I have no quarrel with the results. As I said before, we are deeply indebted to our little firebrand here, and I've been thinking we must do everything possible to help her—education, and all that. You and Mariana will be better authorities in that line than I am—"

"Oh, David, that will be lovely!" cried Mariana with joy in her voice. "I'm simply crazy about Dolores, anyway, and it will be the greatest fun in the world to do things for her!"

The little Mexican girl looked up with misty eyes. She snatched Mariana's hand quickly, kissed it, and leaned the dark head against the davenport beside Mariana's knee.

"And I've been thinking, too," David went on earnestly, "that what we need to cheer us up and make us all happy again, is—a nice, quiet home wedding—say to-morrow evening—I mean this evening, of course, for it's daylight now. Don't you agree, darling?" He cupped her chin in a masterful hand and looked deep into the startled eyes.

"Oh — oh — David!" She smiled palely; the brown curls brushed against his cheek.

He tightened his arm about her and went on with a thrill in his voice, "Now, dear, it's all settled! And it's high time for the bride-elect to get a little beauty sleep! I'll fix up a bromide for your nerves, and you'll be your own sweet self again in plenty of time for the ceremony!"

"And, Mariana," cried Miss Ross, wide awake now, with such an exciting event in prospect, "you won't have to worry about a single thing! I hereby appoint Dr. Austin and Dolores and myself a committee of three to see that every detail is perfect!"

"You've gone through a terrible experience, darling." David laid his cheek against the brown curls as he spoke. "But there's nothing in the world to trouble you now, thanks to the little avenging angel in your home! And, after all, everything has turned out for the best—all's well that ends in a wedding, you know!"

"How dare you pretend that you and I are only acquaintances?"

Cast Aside

By RUBY M. AYRES

MEETING the one girl in the world for him at a seaside resort, Roger Buchanan falls deeply in love with Cecelie Vanstone. She is staying at Newquay with her friend Kathy. On the eve of declaring his love, Roger recognizes in Rosa Desmond, a dancer, the wife of his boyhood, whom he had thought dead for years. Roger tells Cecelie that he made a fool of her in revenge for something she had said of him before they met. He hopes that this, by rousing her pride, will enable her to forget him, since he cannot marry her.

Templeton Vanstone, Cecelie's father, who had deserted her mother years before, returns from abroad a rich man; but no sooner has he established his daughter in an expensive hotel (where Roger sees them dining together), than he dies in an accident.

Cecelie's lawyer insists she have a chaperon, and suggests — Mrs. Philip Buchanan, Roger's brother's wife!

The girl accepts, hoping to be able to make Roger suffer. She engages herself to another man; then Roger, desperate, begs her for an interview.

CHAPTER XXVII

"OH, YOU CAD!"

CECELIE grasped the baluster hard, and for a moment did not answer; then she looked back at him over her shoulder.

"I am in rather a hurry," she said hesitatingly. "But—I can spare a

moment if it's anything important. Shall we go into the library?"

She hummed a snatch of song beneath her breath as she led the way across the hall, and her face looked perfectly unconcerned. Buchanan followed silently.

Cecelie seated herself on the arm of one of the big chairs and looked at Roger unconcernedly.

He had closed the door behind him and stood opposite to her; the yellow light of the autumn sunset streaming through the window on to his thin face, added to his haggard, delicate appearance.

Cecelie saw it and tried not to. It is not an easy matter to keep up a game of pretense when the man one has once loved is looking ill and wretched.

"I hope nothing is the matter?" she said lightly. The silence was becoming unbearable. "I am in rather a hurry—if you wish to say anything—"

He crossed the space between them until he stood quite close to her—so close that for one sickening moment she felt as if she must throw out protesting arms and thrust him away. How could she keep up this indifference if he looked at her like that?

"I am afraid you will think it presumption on my part," began Buchanan stiffly. "But—is it true that you are engaged to Forsyth?"

Cecelie neither moved nor spoke. A spark of anger flashed in her eyes; she raised her head a haughty trifle.

"Really, Mr. Buchanan—" Then suddenly she laughed. "How kind of you to be interested. Who told you? Was it Philip?"

"My brother did mention it to me—yes."

She laughed again.

"I wonder how he guessed! I suppose we must have looked awfully devoted or something—" She hated herself for her flippancy, and yet—she hoped desperately that her words were hurting him just a little — just one tithe of the anguish and despair he had caused her only three short months ago!

"Then it *is* true?" The question was deadly calm; his eyes never left her face.

"Why, of course! I didn't want people to know just yet—but you're different somehow. We were always quite good friends, weren't we?"

She waited a moment, but he did not speak, and she rattled on:

"Of course Donald hasn't any money, but I'm rich enough for that not to matter. Quite a romance, wasn't it?—my father turning up as he did the night we came back from Newquay."

A sudden flush tinged the man's white face.

"Your *father*—" he said rather breathlessly. "Then—the man I saw you with—that night—at dinner—"

Cecelie raised her brows.

"*You* saw me with him — when?" She hesitated; then, "Oh, of course, I remember! You picked up my handkerchief for me, didn't you? I really hardly recognized you at the moment—it was only afterward that I realized you must be Mr. Buchanan. It is strange how one comes across a chance acquaintance again. Isn't it?"

Her pretty eyes met his with polite interest; the smile still lingered about her lips. Buchanan suddenly lost his head as he looked at her. He was ill and utterly wretched; he felt as if she were deliberately trying to drive him mad!

He caught her hands roughly in his, dragging her to her feet.

"If you're trying to hurt me," he said hoarsely, "you're succeeding better than even *you* could wish! How dare you sit there and talk to me of Forsyth? How *dare* you pretend that you and I were only acquaintances? Have you forgotten that night out on the cliff—I made you admit that you loved me then—I'll make you again—you do love me—you *shall* love me!"

He forced her head back against his shoulder; he bent his face. But before his lips touched hers the madness died away as suddenly as it had come. He began to remember what he was doing—what he had done—the mocking face of the woman who was his wife suddenly came between him and Cecelie. He let her go so abruptly that she almost fell—she grasped at the big chair behind her to save herself.

There was a tragic silence; then Buchanan turned away with a groan.

"Oh, my God! What have I done?"

Cecelie's face was paper white, but her eyes blazed.

"You cad!" she said; her voice was only a hoarse whisper. "Oh, you *cad!*"

Buchanan was standing with his hands over his face; to any one less blinded by rage and passion there would have been something infinitely pathetic about the man's whole figure. To any one less prejudiced, it would have been obvious that there was some tragic explanation of his whole conduct; something to account for the sudden loss of self-control; something to plead for him.

But Cecelie had only the one thought in her heart and brain—that twice he had deliberately insulted her. That he was beneath her contempt—even beneath her anger!

Out in the hall Philip's voice suddenly broke the silence:

"Roger! Roger!"

Cecelie moved then; she walked to the door and opened it. On the threshold she turned and looked back at Buchanan—just once; then she closed the door steadily after her.

Philip met her in the hall.

"Have you seen Roger?" he asked hesitatingly. "One of the servants said he was here."

Cecelie was very pale still, but she answered quite evenly. "He did come in—but I think he has gone now."

Afterward she wondered why it was that in spite of everything she felt bound to shield the man who had twice insulted her—the man whom she hated!

CHAPTER XXVIII

"WHO IS THAT?"

KATHY took off her brown gloves, folded them together neatly, stowed them away in a corner of the big divan on which she sat and prepared to enjoy herself.

She had just arrived in Rosa Desmond's flat; she had taken the dancer's impetuous invitation seriously. She would have been surprised could she have known that, for the moment, when her letter came announcing her arrival that afternoon, Rosa had wondered who on earth "Kathy Smith" might be.

Rosa herself wore an elaborate hostess gown, worked with gold and purple threads.

Kathy felt very much out of place in her gaudy surroundings as she sat on the deep divan; her feet stuck stiffly together in front of her, her hands were folded in her lap. Her teacup was balanced in her lap.

"I used to work in a department

store, you know," Kathy began with a burst of confidence. "It was rather nice; we had a very kind floorwalker. He used to help me add up; I never could manage the pennies. Cecelie always could, though; she's very clever."

"Why did you leave, then, if you liked it?"

"Cecelie's father helped me to get into the hospital; I always wanted to be a nurse. He was very kind. I was sorry when he died—he was killed in a motor accident."

"Oh! Have some cake."

"Thank you." Kathy helped herself generously. There was no false pride about her; she had a healthy appetite, and she saw no reason for pretending otherwise.

"And so you're quite happy," Rosa pursued wonderingly. "You like stitching up bandages and washing invalids and pouring out medicines?"

"Oh, yes; I love it. And you get so fond of the patients."

Rosa shivered disdainfully.

"I hope when I die," she said, "that I'll be killed outright. I should hate to have a nurse puttering round me, and a doctor feeling my pulse every two minutes. I had a dose of it once. I was very ill. It's a long time ago; before I was married—"

"Oh, are you married?" asked Kathy eagerly.

Rosa flushed; she laughed rather harshly.

"Yes, worse luck! At least, that's what my husband thinks. He hates me like the devil!" flippantly.

Kathy looked shocked.

"I left him after we'd been married less than a year; and glad I was to see the last of him, and he of me! He wishes I was dead now, anyway," she added bitterly.

Kathy looked sympathetic.

"Oh, I don't suppose he does; he must be very proud of you. Isn't he glad you're so successful?"

"He doesn't care—" Rosa hesitated. "There's another woman, you see," she explained casually. "He'd marry her if I were out of the way; but I'm not going to shuffle off just yet to please him, or her, either. He'd like to divorce me, only he can't."

"How dreadful!"

"Do you think so? It was a mistake from the first, you know. He was only a boy when we were married. I'm older than he is. I suppose I was a fool to give in to him, but he had such a way!" She broke off; the velvety eyes grew dreamy. "I never saw any one so much in love," she added with a sort of pride.

"It must be nice to have some one in love with you. My friend Cecelie had a man in love with her," Kathy said. "But something happened — I don't know what it was—and it all came to an end."

"She jilted him?"

"No—I don't think so—it just ended. I never understood why; he was awfully nice, and Cecelie is a darling!"

"You seem very keen on this 'Cecelie,'" said Rosa with a sort of good-natured contempt.

"I am! She's lovely! And so sweet—I'm sure she'll marry awfully well; she's had another proposal already. She lives with a society woman, you know — they're bringing her out."

Kathy put her cup and plate neatly together, brushed some imaginary crumbs from her lap, and folded her handkerchief.

"I've enjoyed tea very much," she said, glancing at the gun-metal watch on her wrist. "Shall I be a bother to you if I stay a little longer?" she asked

diffidently. "I don't have to be back till five—"

"Goodness, no! Stay as long as you like! I'm pleased to talk to you—it's a change after the cats I have to put up with every day of my life."

"Cats?" echoed Kathy, not understanding.

"Women, I mean, you innocent! They purr when I'm looking, and snarl when I turn my back. They hate me because I'm successful; they forget that I've had my share of the hard side of it all — harder than most of them, too, I'll bet!"

Kathy was looking round the room again; it was filled with beautiful things, silver and china and little ivories. Rosa followed her interested gaze.

"Look round if you care to," she said. "Don't mind me!"

Kathy obeyed, starting her tour of inspection at the mantelshelf while Rosa lolled on her couch.

Kathy paused before an old-fashioned photograph of a very ordinary looking woman with a plain, anxious face. Rosa followed her gaze.

"That's my mother," she said abruptly. "She's dead. She died of a broken heart because of me and the way I behaved."

Kathy made no comment; she did not know what to say. But she was vaguely conscious of hidden emotion in the sharp words.

She recalled what Rosa had said about her husband.

"Why don't you go back to him?" she suggested suddenly.

"Go back to him?" Rosa echoed, not understanding.

"Yes—to your husband, I mean. Perhaps he'd be glad to make it up; perhaps he's only waiting for you to offer. Men are rather proud."

Rosa laughed shrilly.

"I did," she said in a sudden vixenish tone. "I did, and he said he'd rather *die* than live with me again! Looks as if he wants to make it up, doesn't it? He hates me—*you* can't understand that, perhaps, but it's true enough! It would be the happiest day of his life if he heard I was dead."

"You ought not to say things like that," Kathy objected. "And, anyway, it's very wicked of him to hate you if you've never given him any reason to."

Rosa drew a long breath.

"Well — perhaps I have," she admitted reluctantly. "I don't know; we were never meant for each other. We pulled opposite ways all the time—trying to get free—and then, when we found we couldn't, we began to hate each other and fight!" She giggled reminiscently. "My, the scenes we used to have!"

Kathy was pained; this was disillusionment with a vengeance.

"Well, I hope *I* shall never marry," she said anxiously. "I'd hate to be married."

She moved on to the other end of the room.

"What a lovely picture," she said. "Is it Italy?"

"Naples. I went there—on my honeymoon." Again there was that curious softening in the dancer's voice; again the velvety eyes grew dreamy. "A pretty penny *that* trip cost!" she said, with a touch of spitefulness. "We were broke for months afterward—what did you say?"

Kathy was pointing at a portrait hanging on the wall; her face was flushed, her eyes wild with excitement.

"Who's that?" she asked eagerly. "Oh, *who* is that?"

Rosa raised herself on an elbow

and looked casually in the direction Kathy indicated; then she laughed mirthlessly.

"That?" she said, dropping back to the cushions. "Oh, that's the gentleman in question—my husband! It was taken years ago, of course. He's not so good-looking now—he's got thin—but he made a picture then, didn't he?"

Kathy seemed not to have heard. Her pointing hand had fallen limply to her side, and she was staring, staring with growing suspicion and horror at the portrait of Roger Buchanan that smiled back at her from the wall.

CHAPTER XXIX

"THE ONLY WAY OUT"

KATHY went out into the street with a swimming head. She threw prudence and economy to the winds and hailed a taxi.

She sat back in a corner and shut her eyes tight, still with the feeling that she would wake up and find she had been dreaming.

When the cab stopped at the hospital she gave a start. She stumbled out and paid the man, feeling as if she were walking on air. What was the right thing?

She longed for some one to confide in; for some one to advise her—but Cecelie, to whom she had always carried her troubles, was obviously in this case the very one to be avoided.

She slept not at all that night; in the morning her head ached desperately. She remembered the deliberate way in which she had cut Roger Buchanan dead in the hall of his brother's house, and her heart was full of remorse as she recalled the pained, stricken look on his face.

Oh, why had he not told Cecelie the truth? To Kathy's way of thinking it would have been so much easier for them both. She could not see the matter from Buchanan's point of view; she was only sure that had she been in Cecelie's place she would have found the truth easier to bear than the burden he had chosen to lay upon her.

And how he must have suffered himself! Tears welled to Kathy's eyes as she thought of him.

She wanted to see him — to apologize for having cut him a week ago—but she did not know where he was to be found, and it was impossible to ask Cecelie.

She thought the matter over for another whole day; then, after having rewritten it three times, she sent him a letter addressed to his brother's house.

She wrote in what she fondly hoped was a disguised hand, but her heart thumped with apprehension as she dropped it into the box. Supposing Cecelie should see and recognize the writing—supposing Louise, or even Philip opened it by mistake!

She was tortured with nightmare apprehension; she began to look pale and unhappy.

But after all there was no reason for alarm, had she but known it; the letter was taken straight to Roger himself and opened by him.

DEAR MR. BUCHANAN:

Please I want to see you. I can get out any afternoon this week between three and five. Will you please choose a place where we will not be likely to see any one who will know us. It's *very* important!

Yours truly,
KATHY SMITH.

Buchanan read the little letter through twice. A half smile twisted his lips.

He had not forgotten the way in which Kathy had cut him—it had hurt at the time; but somehow since he had admired her for the action. It proved how stanch a friend she was to Cecelie!

What could she want to see him about? He racked his brains unavailingly.

He wrote an answer and sent it to the hospital:

DEAR MISS SMITH:

I received your letter this morning and hasten to reply to it. Will you come to my apartment this afternoon? I hope you will pardon the suggestion, but I can think of no better place.

Yours sincerely,
ROGER BUCHANAN.

Kathy had never been so frightened in her life as when she stood outside the door of the big apartment house where Buchanan lived; more than once she retreated a step, but each time she summoned her courage and went back.

At last she timidly entered and asked for Buchanan in a terrified whisper. When she found herself in the little hall, with the elevator door closed behind her, she felt as if she had just heard prison gates clang.

She heard some one ask her to "Step this way;" and she felt as she followed as if she were walking on air over a bottomless pit. She was vaguely conscious of thick carpets and picture-covered walls—of an air of comfort—of a small fire sending its warm glow over a book-lined room—and then of a man rising from a deep chair and coming forward to meet her.

A kind hand took her shaking one; a voice she had known and grown fond of spoke to her—and then—then Kathy disgraced herself forever in her own eyes by bursting into hopeless weeping.

Buchanan put her gently into the big chair he himself had vacated and left her alone, making some excuse she did not hear.

WHEN he came back she had dried her eyes, and was sitting bolt upright with a red tip to her nose and a very damp handkerchief screwed tightly in her hands.

She looked up at him shamefacedly.

"I'm so sorry. I hardly ever cry. You must think I'm a perfect id-idiot!"

A sob divided the last word.

Buchanan smiled.

"I don't! I often wish I might have the same privilege. I was so pleased to get your letter; it was kind of you to wish to see me."

The tears welled into Kathy's eyes again; she winked them away furiously.

"I've come to ask your pardon," she said tremulously. "To ask your pardon for cutting you the other day—when I was with Cecelie. I didn't know—I didn't understand. Oh, Mr. Buchanan—why *didn't* you tell Cecelie the truth?"

There was a passionate appeal in Kathy's voice; in her intense eagerness she forgot her nervousness. She leaned forward and laid a hand on his arm.

Buchanan stood immovable. In the warm firelight glow he looked terribly ill; there was a sort of blank hopelessness in his eyes.

"Tell her—tell her the truth?" he echoed tonelessly. "What truth?"

"I mean that you were married," said Kathy simply. "Oh, it would have been so much kinder if you had told her the truth, instead of just letting her think that you didn't care—that it was all pretense—" She broke off.

"How did you know—who told you?" He asked the questions hoarsely, dropping into the chair beside her with a sort of weariness. He sat with clasped hands hanging limply between his knees, staring at the fire.

"Your wife," said Kathy.

"My—*wife?*" He echoed the word with repulsion. "Don't call her that. I won't have it!"

"But she *is* your wife," said Kathy; there was gentle insistence in her voice. "Shall I tell you all about it?"

He nodded.

Kathy went over the whole story with careful exactitude; she omitted no detail of her meeting with Rosa.

When she had finished—

"What do you want me to do?" asked Buchanan. He had not moved all the time she was speaking; there was a sort of weary indifference in his voice.

"I want you to tell Cecelie," said Kathy firmly.

He lifted his head then and met her eyes squarely.

"I would rather die!" he said.

He got up and began pacing the room.

"You don't understand, Miss Smith. It's very good of you to have come to see me—but you don't understand. You don't know — you can't realize what it would mean to me to have to tell—to tell Cecelie—that I am married—and to *that* woman!

"I can't do it. I'd do a great deal to please you—but I *can't* do that! I dare say I was wrong in the first place. Perhaps I should have told her the truth. I don't know—but this seemed the best way at the time.

"It's too late now to go back on it. She's forgotten me. There's another man she cares for. What does it matter what she thinks of me? I've brought it on myself. I was only nineteen when I married.

"Every one begged me not to—my brother—all my friends. I wouldn't listen—and now I've only myself to thank."

He came back and stood looking down at her. He held out his hand with a sudden boyish gesture.

"I'm glad we're friends again," he said, smiling faintly. "Do you remember that day in the lounge when you were such a peach? When you asked me not to hurt—not to hurt Cecelie? I've so often thought of that evening since. I promised that I wouldn't, didn't I?"

"I'm not blaming you," said Kathy quickly; she did not know when she had felt so unhappy. She gave his hand a little squeeze, then withdrew her own with embarrassment.

"You don't look well," she said bluntly.

He flushed.

"I'm not up to much. I've been sleeping badly since I came back to town." His voice sounded evasive.

After a pause: "Do you know Donald Forsyth?" he asked abruptly.

Kathy considered.

"Cecelie does, doesn't she?" she asked at length.

"Yes; she's engaged to him."

Kathy stared. "I'm sure she isn't," she protested indignantly.

"She told me she was," said Buchanan.

"Well, she didn't mean it," Kathy persisted flatly. "Why, she told me—" She broke off, unwilling to betray Cecelie's confidence.

A GLEAM of eagerness lit the man's thin face. "What did she tell you?" he asked.

"Oh, Mr. Buchanan, you must

know it couldn't be true!" Kathy said. "Cecelie isn't the sort of a girl to forget any one so quickly; to—to—"

He leaned his elbow on the arm of the chair, shading his eyes with his hand.

"What did she tell you about—about that day at Newquay?" he asked suddenly. "What did she do when you came back to New York? I've heard some story about her father coming home from abroad and dying and leaving her all his money."

Kathy told him all she knew, but she avoided answering his first question.

"Her father was awfully kind to me," she said with a little sigh. "It seemed like a fairy tale when he came—Cecelie was so ill."

Kathy went down on her knees beside her. "Oh, my poor darling!" she wept

"*Ill?*"

"Yes. She was taken ill the night we came back from Newquay. She wasn't *very* ill," she added hurriedly, anxious to spare him. "The doctors

said she just wanted rest. So I kept her in bed. And then her father came, and she had everything she wanted; and then he was killed in a motor accident, as I told you. And then"—Kathy drew a long breath—"then Cecelie went to live with Mrs. Philip Buchanan."

"Yes; and what did you think of that?"

Kathy hesitated.

"Cecelie knows best about her own affairs, of course," she said loyally. "But I didn't like it very much. I don't like Mrs. Buchanan," she added stoutly.

"You never did, did you?" he asked whimsically.

"No; and, oh, Mr. Buchanan, if you would only tell Cecelie the whole truth — or let me! All her thoughts about you are so wrong. She tries to make herself believe that she hates you; she tries to believe that she despises you; that she wants to *hurt* you!

"That's why she went to your brother's house; she knew she would meet you, and she wanted to show you that she didn't care. It's not like her to be revengeful; it's not fair that she should be made to feel like that. Do, *please*, tell her the truth!"

There was a long silence. The man in the chair did not move.

Kathy spoke his name presently, rather timidly.

He sat up then, still without looking at her.

"If I told her," he said quietly, "it could do no good—now—and it might undo any good I have already done. If—if she ever cared about me at all—I hope she's forgotten it. Rosa Desmond is young; I don't want her to die. I'm not such a cur as that."

"If she knew the truth," said Kathy, "she might still be unhappy; but it would be a better *sort* of unhappiness. I know if *I* were asked to choose in her place, I would rather know."

Buchanan seemed to hesitate for a moment. Then:

"Just now you told me that I looked ill," he said quietly. "Well, I *am* ill." He half smiled, meeting her terrified eyes. "I saw my doctor this morning and he said"—and now he looked away from her out of the window into the street, where the early winter afternoon was turning to gray twilight.

And instead of the rows of houses opposite, he saw the dancing water of Newquay Bay, and instead of the roar of passing traffic, he heard the thud of the waves on the rocks at the foot of the cliff; and in place of this girl opposite him he saw a slim, radiant figure in a white frock who, for a few unforgetable days, had walked beside him in the Garden of Eden, and in imagination he heard her voice as he heard it then. "Have you ever loved any other woman?" and his own answer:

"Never in my life."

It was true! Beside his love for Cecelie his infatuation for the woman who was his wife had been but a chimera. All his life he had loved no other—he would die loving her only!

He gave a half sigh and looked again at Kathy.

"I've got my marching orders, that's all," he said simply.

Kathy did not understand.

"Your — marching orders?" she echoed blankly.

"Yes."

Something in his eyes, in the tone of his voice, told her what his words had failed to convey. She felt as if every drop of blood in her body were frozen; she felt herself going white to the very lips.

Death! That was to be the one way out for them all, as she had foreseen. But *not* the death of the woman who barred the way to their happiness!

Kathy felt as if she were choking. Twice she tried to speak, but could find no words.

"I don't *want* to kick off, of course," said Buchanan, trying to laugh. "But if it's got to come—"

Kathy found her voice at last; she spoke jerkily, as if she were fighting for breath.

"And knowing this, you still won't tell Cecelie?" she asked painfully.

He raised his head and looked at her.

"No," he answered.

Kathy leaned her head against the chair back. She felt weak and giddy, but her voice was resolute when she spoke.

"Then *I* will," she said.

CHAPTER XXX

"BECAUSE HE'S DYING!"

OFTEN in the years that followed Kathy said that the one time when she ever troubled to exert her will was that afternoon in Roger Buchanan's apartment.

She resisted Buchanan now with almost bulldog pertinacity.

In vain he pleaded with her; in vain he tried to force her round to his way of thinking; in vain he tried to make her agree that silence now—whatever it had been in the first place—was the only possible way of sparing Cecelie unnecessary pain.

"They tell me I've got to die," he urged almost roughly. "So what is the use of making a hero of a man who already has both feet in the grave? It would make it harder for me if Cecelie — if I knew she — if I thought she—" He floundered helplessly and burst out angrily: "You must do as I say—you must promise me that Cecelie shall never know one word of all this; you *must* promise me!"

"I will *not!*" said Kathy.

She looked very pale and distressed; she was terrified at her own temerity, and yet she knew in her heart that she had no least intention of giving way to this man's will.

If he had but a few months to live—well, so much greater the reason for the stand she had taken. If, quite apart from his wife's existence, he and Cecelie must say an eternal farewell, so much greater the reason again!

Kathy brought her whole soul to bear on the situation, and from every point her heart and conscience applauded her.

This man has done a quixotic action; he had tried to spare the woman he loved, and had only succeeded in hurting her more. Cecelie should have her little day now, come what might!

"It's wrong of you not to wish her to be told," Kathy declared, and tears swam in her honest eyes as she raised them to Buchanan's face. "Can't you see that you are robbing her of her last little chance of happiness? You think you're being unselfish, but you're not—it's *cruel* to her!"

"Her chance of *happiness?*" he echoed bitterly. "What chance of happiness can there be for her — for either of us? If she cares anything for me it will break her heart all over again to know that—what the doctors have told me. And do you think I want to make a final exit to the sound of her tears?"

His voice was bitterly ironic; Kathy

could see plainly that he had no least belief that Cecelie still cared for him.

"You can say what you like," she answered. "I mean what I say! When I leave here I shall go to Cecelie as fast as a taxi can take me, and tell her word for word what I've said to you and what you've said to me."

"I shall deny every word of it—she won't believe you!"

"I've never told Cecelie a lie in all my life," Kathy answered steadily. "Perhaps — if you hadn't told me—what—what the doctors said I might have not told her; but, as it is—"

A big tear rolled down Kathy's nose and splashed onto her coat; she looked up at him pathetically.

"Oh, are you *sure, sure* that they aren't making any mistake?" she asked tremblingly. "Aren't there any other doctors you can go to? You're rich—you could pay the very best men."

"I have!" he said whimsically. "It's to their interest to keep me alive, I assure you. Two or three of them have been drawing an income from me for the past twelve months."

He laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Don't cry, Kathy." Neither of them noticed that he had used her Christian name. "I dare say it's the best way out for us all, or it wouldn't happen! Isn't there something about all things working together for good? Well, we'll try to look at it like that. Please don't cry!"

But Kathy sobbed desolately for a few moments; it seemed a terrible tragedy to her that this man—in the early prime of life—should be walking in the shadow of the Dark Angel.

BUCHANAN stood beside her silently; he was too kind hearted to let her see how her sobbing got on his nerves and jarred him, but he gave a sigh of relief when at last she mopped her eyes.

"That's better," he said gratefully. "Now cheer up and don't cry any more, there's a dear soul! Will you come and see me again some day? Would you like me to take you for a run out in my car, or to a theater?"

"You're very k-kind," said Kathy with a sob. "I should like to go very much—but I must tell Cecelie first."

"I asked you to promise me that you would not!"

"I know—but I didn't promise!" said Kathy quickly.

And the argument began all over again. Buchanan begged and entreated; finally he lost his temper, but Kathy held her ground.

"I know it's the right thing," she persisted. "I am very sorry if you are angry—I hope you won't hate me for doing it—but I shall, whatever you say!"

She rose as she spoke, and pulled on her gloves. Buchanan barred her way.

"Kathy! I thought you were going to be a pal to me—" he began.

"That's what I'm trying to be," she told him quaveringly. He made an impatient gesture.

"You're not! You're deliberately going against my wishes! I won't let you leave here till you give me your word not to tell Cecelie anything of all this."

Kathy gave him an April smile.

"Then I shall have to stay here forever!" she said resolutely.

He leaned against the door and folded his arms; he looked flushed and agitated. Kathy was conscious of a sudden qualm; she knew that excitement was bad for him; and yet here she was, deliberately angering him!

She began to plead afresh; he shook his head—his kind mouth was hard.

Suddenly with a sort of passionate revulsion of feeling he flung away from the door.

"Do as you please! It's mere waste of breath to argue."

He was sorry as soon as the words were spoken; he would have given much to recall them. But Kathy had not waited to give him the chance; she was out of the room and down the stairs.

WHEN she reached Philip Buchanan's big house, she was told that Cecelie was out.

The disappointment was like a dash of cold water over her excited enthusiasm.

"Oh!" she said forlornly.

The man unbent a little; he remembered having seen Kathy with Cecelie. He said if she would step in he would inquire what time Miss Vanstone would be home.

Kathy obeyed with alacrity; she was shown into the drawing-room, and the door softly closed.

After what seemed an interminable time, the man came back.

"Miss Vanstone is expected very shortly," he said. "If you would care to wait?"

"Of course," said Kathy.

She sat down in a chair with a determined air, as if she meant to stay there all night, and the servant withdrew.

The house was very silent; the great room seemed unaccountably vast and lonely. When—presently—the clock on the mantelshelf struck, Kathy felt as if a gun had suddenly been fired beside her.

She began to wonder what she should say to Cecelie when she came—how she could begin. She wondered if, after all, Buchanan had been wiser than she—if his was really the right course to adopt?

She clasped her hands in her lap as if seeking strength and comfort from the contact.

"I'm sure I'm right. I'm sure I'm right," she told herself over and over again. "If he dies, and Cecelie heard about this afterward, she would never forgive me!"

A motor stopped outside. Kathy sprang to her feet and rushed to the window, but she was too late to see who entered.

She went back to her chair with a fast-beating heart. There were voices in the hall now—and footsteps—then—the door opened and Cecelie came in.

"Kathy! Dear old Kathy!" There was unfeigned delight in Cecelie's voice; she put an arm round Kathy's stiff figure, and kissed her heartily.

"Why didn't you let me know you were coming? I'd have stayed in for you. How lovely to see you again!"

Cecelie was exquisitely gowned; Louise had taken her to her own modiste. The graceful lines of the soft, beige frock suited Cecelie's slim figure to perfection. She wore a fox fur, drooping loosely from her shoulders; a small brown hat covered her wealth of hair.

But Kathy was in no mood to notice clothes; her earnest face was pale and tense—she hardly returned her friend's kiss.

She was about to plunge into voluminous explanations when she was aware that Cecelie was not alone; a tall man with smiling, boyish face had followed her into the room.

Cecelie saw her eyes wander to him; she turned with a little laugh.

"Donald — this is Kathy! Kathy, this is Mr. Forsyth. You've both

heard about each other, so I hope you'll be good friends."

The young man bowed, and said he hoped so, too—but Kathy only stared at him blankly.

In her eyes he was an intruder—an unwanted intruder! How dared Cecelie call him by his Christian name?

Her heart swelled with anger as she thought of Roger Buchanan—his thin, tired face—his eager eyes.

She caught Cecelie's hand imperatively.

"I want to speak to you alone—it's dreadfully important!" Her eyes were filled with entreaty.

Cecelie's smile faded; she spoke again to the man beside her.

"I am afraid I must send you away now—do you mind? Kathy has something very wonderful to say to me. I'll see you to-night."

She held her hand to him; in defiance of Kathy's presence, he bent and kissed it.

WHEN he had gone, Kathy burst into angry speech.

"How *dare* he kiss your hand! How can you let him do such a thing?"

"Kathy!" Cecelie's voice was amazed.

Kathy flung eager arms round the younger girl.

"Oh, don't be cross with me, darling—such a dreadful thing has happened, and I suppose I'm upset—but I felt as if I could have *killed* him when he stood there beside you, looking as if you belonged to him! Cecelie—you haven't forgotten Newquay, and—"

Cecelie freed herself with gentle deliberation.

"If you've come to talk about that, I won't listen. I never look back—I always look forward—*forward!* There must be something pleasant still waiting for me in the future—something to wipe that out!"

She spoke passionately; her eyes blazed.

Kathy clung to her hand.

"Cecelie—I don't know how to tell you—you know what a fool I am at explaining things—try and understand! I—I've seen Mr. Buchanan—this afternoon—"

"Mr. Buchanan!" echoed Cecelie blankly. "But—why, you cut him dead — only the other day — in this house!"

"I know! That's just the awful part of it! I went to apologize— Oh, Cecelie—do—*do* try to understand!"

Cecelie laughed coldly.

"I understand very well! You soon alter your opinion of people, Kathy. But don't let us talk any more about it—he is of no possible interest to me—"

"But he is! He *is!*" Kathy insisted, almost in tears. "That's why I'm here! It's to tell you the truth — the truth about the way he treated you — the truth of the whole miserable affair!"

Cecelie was very pale, but her eyes were defiant.

"There is only one explanation! He made a fool of me! I don't want to hear about him—I hate the name of Roger Buchanan!"

"Cecelie!"

Kathy's thin fingers gripped Cecelie's hand in a vise. What would she say when she knew that Roger Buchanan was dying?

"You *shall* listen to me," she said fiercely. "I *will* tell you. Mr. Buchanan behaved as he did because he was not free to love you—he didn't know it that night when he asked you to marry him—he thought she was dead! But she wasn't.

"And then, when he found out, he thought it was the best way to save you pain! He was wrong — I know you will say he was wrong; but he did it to save you! He couldn't bear that you should know about her—he loved you all the time— Oh, Cecelie, he's just been breaking his heart about you!"

There was a tragic silence in the beautiful room. Cecelie's face was marble white; she stared at Kathy with wide eyes and parted lips. When she spoke, her voice sounded harsh and strange.

"I don't know what you mean—I think you must be mad! What do you mean, that he wasn't '*free*'—what do you mean by saying that he thought she was dead?—who—who is '*she*'?"

"His *wife*," said Kathy with a sob.

Silence. Then:

"His—*wife!*" The words were just an echoed whisper.

Kathy rushed on recklessly; she knew she had burned her boats now; she knew that she must go on—that there was no possible way of retreat.

"He married her when he was nineteen—they were unsuited, and his people were all against it! It turned out badly—and she left him. It's years ago. He thought she was dead—she let him think so; but she turned up again—she was down at Newquay and they met. That's why he treated you as he did. Oh, Cecelie, *say* something—don't look like that!"

Kathy had told her story badly, disconnectedly—but she had told it; and she felt as if a great load had been lifted from her heart.

Whatever happened now—if Buchanan died — if Cecelie married the man who had had the effrontery to kiss her hand, Kathy told herself that she would always have the consolation of knowing that she had done her best to help them both!

They would both hate her, but—

"I THINK you must be mad," said Cecelie slowly; pitifully. "I can't understand—you tell things so badly. You say that—that Mr. Buchanan is married — that his wife is alive — then — then — where is his wife—*who* is his wife?"

"Rosa Desmond—the dancer!"

Cecelie groped backward blindly for a chair and dropped into it. She looked stunned—shocked—there was a childish helplessness about her that was infinitely pathetic. Kathy went down on her knees beside her.

"Oh, darling, speak to me! Don't look like that! It's all true! I know I tell things badly—but I always did! I went to tea with Miss Desmond, and she had a portrait of Mr. Buchanan on the wall. I recognized it, of course, and then she told me that he was her husband."

Cecelie shivered; she closed her eyes with a sick feeling.

Rosa Desmond, the dancer! She thought of the woman as she had seen her only a few nights since—her beauty, her grace, the wonderful power of the slim, lissom body!

No wonder men loved her—no wonder Roger—

A sudden blank seemed to enfold her—the room seemed to be rushing away from her—she could only hear Kathy's pleading voice as if it were whispering.

Cecelie bit her lip hard till the blood came — she clenched her hands. She would not faint, she *would not!* It was all a dream—all a dream! She would wake soon and know that she had dreamed it all. She opened her eyes desperately.

Kathy knelt there with the tears streaming down her cheeks. Cecelie pushed her away with a revulsion of feeling.

She could not rid herself of the memory of Rosa's face—the witching, velvety eyes, the white arms, the dainty feet.

She remembered that Forsyth's friend had spoken of Roger Buchanan being behind the scenes with her. Sudden, blinding jealousy flooded Cecelie's heart. It seemed to rush through her body like some fiery stream, then it was gone, and she felt nothing but numb cold.

She forced a laugh; she rose to her feet.

"What a romance!" she said lightly. "How kind of you to come and tell me! It's most interesting. I suppose now they'll live happily ever after, like the prince and the beggar maiden!"

Kathy covered her eyes with her hands.

Live happily ever after, when the feet of one of them, at least, was already treading the narrow path that leads to the grave!

"I don't know why you rushed to me with your news like this!" Cecelie went on harshly. "It's nothing to me! Because I was a fool once, and thought I liked him—" She spoke with jerky gasps, almost as if she were drowning; vivid patches of color stood on either white cheek.

"Oh!" she burst out with sudden rage. "How *dare* you come here and tell me this? I don't want to hear it—I won't listen! I hate him and everything to do with him. I told you so!

"I'm going to marry Donald Forsyth—*he* loves me, at any rate! He would never break my heart and ruin my life—he'd rather die than cause me a tear! What do *I* care what Roger Buchanan does? Let me go, Kathy—let me go!"

She fought fiercely against her friend's arms, but Kathy held her fast.

"If you don't listen to me, Cecelie," she said, "you'll be sorry all your life! If you marry Mr. Forsyth you'll be a miserable woman! You've got to forgive Mr. Buchanan—you've got to tell him so—"

Cecelie burst into shrill laughter.

"I forgive him? *I* tell him so? For Heaven's sake, *why?*"

There was bitter scorn and anger in her voice; her eyes flashed feverishly.

Kathy let her hands fall to her side; her honest eyes looked reproachfully at her friend.

"Because he's dying," she said simply. "That's why!"

CHAPTER XXXI

LOVE AND HONOR

ROGER BUCHANAN had fallen asleep in his chair by the fire.

Twice his man had looked in to tell him that dinner was served, and twice he had gone softly away again.

It was quite dark in the room, save for the glow of the fire, which the man had carefully fed before he stole away; the shades were drawn.

For an hour after Kathy had gone Buchanan had sat there by the fire, thinking—wondering—not daring to hope.

He did not believe that Kathy would keep to her resolution and tell Cecelie. He was sure that she would think better of it and do as he had wished.

What good would it do if Cecelie knew? They would still be as far apart as ever. The paths they must tread would still diverge as hopelessly

as before—only his would end soon. Very soon, perhaps, in a narrow grave.

There was nothing morbid about Buchanan. He was not afraid of death. After the first moment of agonized shock he had taken his sentence manfully.

After all, life held nothing very much for him—he had never cared greatly for his wealth or the pleasures it could bring. Looking back on the years that had gone, there was but one time which stood out in letters of gold—those two short weeks at Newquay!

He wanted Cecelie. Nothing else mattered—Louise and her boy, or Rosa Desmond might have his wealth and welcome, if they would give him Cecelie!

It was crying for the moon. Cecelie hated him—if she had ever loved him even just a little, she hated him now!

How often in his dreams had her last words to him on the wind-swept cliff pierced his heart.

"Oh, if I could only kill you—if I could only *kill* you!"

Well, perhaps she had got her wish. Perhaps it was because he could not live without her that he had given up the fight for life, and was content to let it go.

At any rate, death would be kind; for there would be no dreaming—no phantom kisses from lips that could never be his—only a long, long sleep.

Buchanan leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

The waking dream and the sleeping mingled so naturally that he did not know that he had fallen asleep—did not know that for the third time his man stole softly into the room and bent anxiously over him. He was far away by a blue bay, with the sunshine on his face, and the woman he loved beside him—he could feel her soft hand in his.

So real was the touch of her fingers that the restlessness fell away from him—a glorious sense of peace crept into his aching heart. He had only to open his eyes to find her there beside him—the past three months were the dream; he had only to open his eyes to wake once more to the glorious reality of those two short weeks.

A stifled sigh that was almost a groan burst from his lips—he sat up wildly and opened his eyes.

And there—not a pace away from him in the firelight—was Cecelie, even as he had dreamed!

For a moment he stared at her—stared at her with all his longing heart in his eyes. It was over—this long, horrible nightmare—and she was with him again!

Almost he had held out his arms to her—almost spoken her name, when he saw she was not wearing the white frock. She was beautifully dressed, more like the women he knew, Louise's friends, with their smart frocks and expensive jewelry.

"Cecelie!" He stretched out his hand now and touched hers — and it was a real hand! His fingers closed over warm, living flesh!

HE started to his feet with a confused cry.

Of course! He remembered! He had fallen asleep by the fire after Kathy had left him—he had been dreaming—and yet—what was Cecelie doing here? He looked at her wonderingly.

"I'm sorry," he said—he spoke stupidly. "I didn't hear you come in. Is Louise with you—or Philip?"

How silly of him to have forgot-

ten—how foolish of him to have dreamed that she would still wear the cheap, white frock! She was rich now; rich enough to buy all the things his heart had once longed to give her. He made a desperate effort to pull himself together.

do as I wanted her to—she's very impulsive—I hope she hasn't been worrying you?"

Sudden giddiness seized him; he dropped back into the chair.

"I'm sorry—please forgive me! I don't believe I'm properly awake." He

He drew closer, and knew at last what ecstasy it was to lay his cheek to hers

Were those tears in her eyes? Surely not—he was not properly awake yet—he was still dreaming, and yet—yes, they *were* tears! He could hear them in her voice when she spoke—when she answered him.

"No, I came alone. Kathy sent me."

"*Kathy* sent you?"

Ah, he was awake now! His heart gave a great throb, and for a moment the blood hammered in his temples.

"Kathy and I quarreled," he heard himself saying dully. "She wouldn't

leaned his head for a moment in his hands.

But surely he was dreaming still, for soft arms came round his shoulders—a cheek wet with tears was pressed against his clenched hands—and Cecelie's voice—Cecelie's voice as it had been in those far-away golden days at Newquay spoke to him—not harshly, or contemptuously as she had spoken that last time in Philip's study—not with light indifference as in the hotel—but with that wonderful note every woman keeps for the man she loves.

"Oh, do you love me; do you still love me?"

Buchanan lifted his head; sudden, swift denial rushed to his lips, but the words crept away like shamed traitors before the gaze of her tearful eyes.

"I love you with all my heart and soul," was what he said.

They looked at each other silently, and in that long moment all the bitterness and heartbreak and misery seemed swept away; they were back again in the golden sunshine of a summer's day—happy lovers!

Then Buchanan put her gently aside and rose to his feet.

"Kathy has told you?" he said hoarsely.

"Yes."

"Oh, Cecelie!"

Cecelie knelt where he had left her. She was trembling in every limb. She was conscious of a sort of agonized relief, such as one feels when deadly pain is assuaged. But he had not kissed her—did not mean to kiss her?

She rose swiftly to her feet; she stood leaning against the high chair back.

Buchanan had rested his elbow on the mantelshelf and his head on his hands. He spoke with averted face.

"I begged her not to tell you, and now what good has it done? I hoped you had forgotten me—I wanted you to forget me. No—no; I don't mean that. God knows I don't. I love the very ground you walk on. I'd give twenty years of my life if—"

He broke off desolately. Twenty years of his life! His thoughts seemed to stop short, as a man does who has unsuspectingly walked a fair pathway that has traitorously led him to a chasm.

Twenty years of his life, when already his very days were numbered; when already the little that was left to him of life was bounded on all sides by the dark narrowness of the grave!

Cecelie looked at him with anguished eyes; she knew what he was thinking—knew that his thoughts had flown to that dark Shadow, the dread name of which had nearly stopped her heartbeats when Kathy's trembling lips first spoke it.

SHE moved across the firelit space between them and stood beside him.

"I love you," she said steadily. "And if you love me nothing shall ever part us again. I've borne all that I can bear. If you send me away now—" She broke off, her voice trembling.

She was not sure of him yet; in spite of his physical weakness, in spite of the terror lying in wait for them both like some beast of prey, she was conscious of the iron will-power which had breathed through his quietly spoken words, and kept him from taking her in his arms.

"Oh!" she broke out again, with anguish in her voice. "If it's true—what Kathy says—that the doctors say you can't ever get well, it can't be wrong of us to want just a little happiness? I've suffered so much. Are you going to leave me nothing to remember all my life, but just those few short days at Newquay? Roger, Roger, if you love me at all—" A sob broke her voice, but she clenched her teeth. She would not cry! She *would not!*

All the rest of her life she could weep and be sorry, and break her heart for the ruin of their happiness; the moments were too precious now to waste.

"Oh, can't you understand, dear,"

she went on falteringly, "that there is so much I want you to tell me—so much I want to know? It can't be hurting any one if we just love each other. I want you to say that you've wanted me every day since that morning on the cliff. I want you to say that you love me a thousand times more than you ever—ever—loved—loved—any other woman."

She could not bring herself to speak Rosa's name; a vivid picture of the dancer — her velvety eyes — her slim gracefulness for a moment seared her heart; bitter jealousy lashed her with thongs of flame.

She clasped her hands round the arm on which his head lay; she bent her head to rest against his sleeve.

"Let me stay with you—let me stay with you," she pleaded hoarsely. "What do *I* care what people say? There is nobody in the world who matters but you—I've tried to hate you—you've made me suffer enough . . . any more . . . I can't . . . I *can't!*"

Her groping fingers found his clenched hand; she pressed her lips to it, kissing it passionately.

Poor Cecelie! Remorse, as well as love tore her heart. She was remembering her bitter thoughts of him; remembering that she had—even if but for a brief moment—allowed another man to believe he filled Buchanan's place.

She could have gone on her knees to him in her anguish, and all the time, all the time she was conscious that—well as he loved her—he would yet find the strength to send her away.

He loved her well enough to live without her—he loved her well enough to face death without her. She could never be his wife, and so she must go out of his life.

The door of eternal separation would close between them under the push of his own hand—and soon the great gates that divide life from death would roll relentlessly together, and she would be left alone on the side of desolation where he was not!

Buchanan moved suddenly; he put an arm about her and drew her to him so that her head lay against his shoulder, but she could not see his face.

"I've never loved any woman in all my life but you," he said; he spoke slowly as if he were choosing his words carefully, so that she might remember them afterward. "That—other—was nothing—*nothing*—to my love for you! I'd give my soul to make you my wife, but it can't be, sweetheart—and you, my Cecelie, must help me.

"Cecelie—you're so young—you'll forget me. No, no, I don't mean that—" The arm about her tightened passionately. "I don't want you to forget me—but you mustn't be unhappy—you must always remember that I loved you with every breath in my body.

"I nearly went mad with misery when you went away without one word—without saying good-by. But we won't think of that—we'll just remember how happy we were.

"Do you remember the first time I kissed you? You were so angry. And the last time—in Philip's library? Cecelie—I did it all for the best—I thought it would help you to forget, if you believed I had never cared about you. Oh, my darling, forgive me if I hurt you. I didn't mean to—I wanted to save you!"

"If you send me away now," said Cecelie passionately, "I shall *die!* If I'm not afraid to stay—surely you—" She broke down and clung to him. "Let me stay with you—let me stay!"

For a moment the silence was broken only by her pitiful sobbing; then Buchanan turned, put both arms round her, and stooping, kissed her once on the lips—a long, long kiss that seemed almost like a farewell — then he let her go.

She stood a pace from him, dazed, weeping — not understanding. The room was very dark, for the fire had died down—it was nothing now but a red glow, and she could not see his face.

Some one tapped softly on the door — after a second's pause, it opened, and Philip came in.

Seeing the room in darkness, he groped along the wall and switched on the light. Then he stood staring.

Roger falteringly stepped toward him — his face was ghastly, his outstretched hands trembling.

"Take her away," he said hoarsely. "For God's sake take her away!"

CHAPTER XXXII

"DON'T TELL ME HE'S DEAD!"

KATHY'S courage had failed her utterly from the moment when she flung her last card at Cecelie's feet.

Once the fateful words were spoken, once Cecelie knew what the doctors had said of Buchanan, Kathy's nerves went hopelessly to pieces. She began to cry and wring her hands; for the first time doubt of the wisdom of her action overwhelmed her. She was terrified by the expression in Cecelie's eyes, the white misery of her face.

Dying, and he did not know how much she loved him! Dying, and she had said that she never wished to see him again!

With sudden frenzy Cecelie had turned and rushed wildly from the room.

Kathy let her go with a feeling of utter helplessness; she sat and sobbed desolately in the lonely splendor of the big room; she forgot everything but her own dread of the holocaust which she had brought about her defenseless head. She was a huddled, weeping heap in the armchair when Philip Buchanan came in.

He stood and stared at her.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated helplessly.

Kathy lifted her head and showed her tear-stained disfigured face.

"Good Lord!" said Philip again. He came forward, scratching his chin. "What in the world's the matter?" he asked in concern. "You're Cecelie's friend, aren't you?"

Kathy heard the kindliness in his voice; she remembered that he had always been smiling and good-natured when they were at Newquay. She sobbed out her story to him.

Philip listened in dismay. When she had finished he gave a long whistle.

"So she knows, does she? Poor little girl!" He looked round the room, and his eyes fell on his brother's portrait. "Where is she?" he asked; it was beginning to dawn on him that there was something very tragic in it all.

"She's gone!" sobbed Kathy. "She ran out of the room—oh, suppose she's gone to *kill* herself—"

Philip shook his head.

"Not likely," he said with sudden inspiration. "She's gone to Roger." He scratched his chain again. "Poor old Roger!" he ejaculated soberly.

Kathy was recovering slowly; she mopped her eyes and sobbed more quietly.

"Well, then, you must go after

her," she told him. "I would, but I must get back to the hospital—I'll be late now." She rose to her feet, checking a sob, and began to draw on her inevitable gloves.

"I'll drive you down," said Philip. "And then I'll go on to Roger. Cecelie's all right if she's with him."

Kathy sobbed again in the shelter of the car.

"If only Mr. Buchanan were free!" she wailed. "But he never will be. It isn't that I want his wife to die. But—"

"Oh, *she* won't die," said Philip gloomily. "She'll outlive Roger. The doctors say he doesn't seem to have the will to live—that he doesn't seem to care. He'll just *let* himself die. He was miles better in summer, too. Is this the hospital?"

"Y-yes." Kathy shook hands with him. "Let me know what happens," she begged. "And if Cecelie wants me, I'll come—no matter what they say at the hospital. She's all I've got to love in the world!"

She mopped her red eyes, and looked at him with watery pathos.

"Cheer up!" said Philip kindly; he felt very doleful himself. He got out of the motor and stood beside her.

She gave his hand a little squeeze—

"Good-by," she said.

She ran up the flight of stone steps and disappeared into the gaping doorway.

Philip went back to the car and drove to Roger's apartment.

He was desperately sorry for his brother—desperately sorry for Cecelie. Life was rotten he told himself.

He had quarreled with Louise again that morning, and she had told him she was sick of him. She had told him the same thing often before, but it was only lately that it had begun to occur to his slow brain that she might really mean it.

He decided that if anything happened to Roger, he would leave her for a while—it might do her all the good in the world to be a grass widow for a few months.

So he told himself with sublime ignorance of the fact that grass widowhood was exactly what Louise craved.

HE never forgot the face his brother turned to him—its hopeless, haggard lines and despairing eyes.

"Take her away—for God's sake take her away!"

Philip went across the room to where Cecelie stood; she looked so young and desolate. He put a kind, brotherly arm around her.

"Poor little girl," he said, and there was a most uncomfortable lump in his own throat. "Poor little girl—try and be brave—it's worse for Roger. Let me take you home."

She did not resist when he drew her to the door; she seemed past caring what happened to her. He held her hands all the way home; he talked to her gently, soothingly as one might talk to a child.

He said that he was sure everything would come right in the end. It was only then that she seemed to hear, and was driven to passionate speech.

"It never will! It never will!"

The words were but an echo of the conviction in his own heart; he attempted no further consolation. It seemed cruel to raise a hope that could only be shattered.

When they got home Cecelie went up to her room and locked the door; she begged Philip to see that she was left alone.

"I'm not going to kill myself, or do

anything like that," she said with the ghost of a smile, meeting his concerned eyes. "But I want to be left alone."

Philip promised; at the foot of the stairs he bent and kissed her cheek gently.

"I wish I could help you," he said helplessly. "I'd give anything if I could see you both happy."

Behind her locked door, Cecelie flung herself down by the bed. She did not cry—her eyes were hot and burning; there was a terrible lost feeling throughout her whole being.

This was the end of everything! She would never see Roger again—forcing herself to eat and trying to sleep, and to smile, and pretend that she did not even care, and then—one day somebody — perhaps Philip—would come to her with tears in his eyes, and say:

"Roger is dead."

And then her heart would stop beating, and her soul would die, even if her body lived on for years and years.

Beyond that she could not think; over and over again she lived through that moment when they would tell her that Roger was dead.

Hours passed.

Now and then little sounds in the house distracted her; sometimes she heard steps outside her door — once some one knocked softly on the panel.

She began to cry fretfully; why could they not leave her alone? Philip had promised that nobody should come to her; he was unkind, he had not kept his promise.

She lay back on the bed and closed her eyes—her head was burning; that one thought in her brain was like a wheel of fire that never ceased revolving.

"Roger is dead. Roger is dead."

That was what they would tell her some day; not just yet, perhaps, not for months, but it would come in the end; and then the sun would never shine any more.

"Cecelie—Cecelie!" That was Kathy's voice calling her.

Why could they not let her alone? She pressed her hands over her ears to shut out its soft pleading.

She waited a moment; when she listened again, the voice was silent.

It was quite dark in the room. Out in the street she could hear the rumbling of passing vehicles, the yellow light of a street lamp shone through the window like a curious eye, eager to spy upon her misery.

Some one else was calling her name now.

"Cecelie!" It sounded like Philip's voice—or was it Donald Forsyth's? Poor Donald! She would have to tell him that she could never be engaged to him now. But, of course, he would no longer wish it when she told him that her heart and soul were dying and going into the grave with Roger Buchanan!

"Cecelie!" It came again, louder and more insistent, and now some one was trying the handle of the door.

Cecelie turned her burning cheek on the pillow; she thought that she called out, "Go away—go away!" but no words came from her lips.

There were voices talking together outside the door; she wondered what they were talking about. Why couldn't they go somewhere else in the house if they must speak so loudly? The house was big enough, surely!

And that was Louise now. Her shrill tones rose above the others. Her voice sounded angry.

"Somebody must break the door down," she was saying. "A nice scandal if anything should happen here!

You were always a fool, Philip! You ought not to have left her alone!"

What were they talking about, Cecelie wondered vaguely. She strained her ears to listen, but the voices dragged away into silence — and the fiery wheel started again in her head.

"Roger is dead! Roger is dead!"

She felt that she must shriek if it did not stop. She felt that she would go mad or die!

A GRINDING, tearing noise of splintering wood for a moment drowned its cruel insistence—then a rending crash.

Cecelie started up in the darkness and screamed shrilly. She felt as if every nerve in her body had been torn by a relentless hand. She cried out hysterically:

"What is it? What is the matter?"

The door had been forced open. It swung crookedly on its hinges. A stream of light flooded the room from the landing beyond—she had a momentary impression of a group of figures.

Then one separated from the others and came toward her—a tall figure, silhouetted against the light from the open doorway behind. With quick strides he covered the space to where she stood clinging to the bedpost.

She knew who it was. It was Philip; and already he had come to tell her that Roger was dead! In a moment he would speak the words that would drive her mad!

She flung up her arms and bent them above her head as if to ward off a blow; she screamed out shrilly:

"Don't say it! Don't say it! I know! I know—but don't say it! I shall go mad if you say he is dead!"

"Oh, my darling—my darling!" said an anguished voice.

Tender arms enwrapped her; her throbbing head was pressed to a beating heart; shaking lips kissed her eyes—her hair—

It was a dream—a cruel, cheating dream that would presently fade away into nothingness, as all those others had done, and leave her a shivering stricken soul once more!

She would not yield to it. She *would* not. She beat at the arms holding her with frenzied delirium. She tried to steel her lips against the kisses.

"Roger! Roger!" she moaned; and again the voice spoke through the awful space in which she seemed to be floating:

"I am here, Cecelie. I am holding you in my arms. I will never let you go again! Look at me, sweetheart! Oh, my poor little love!"

There was a light in the room now—a bright light that hurt her eyes. Some one was bathing her forehead. Some one was holding her hands.

Cecelie opened her eyes dizzily to Roger's ashen face bending over her.

It was only a dream, of course—only a dream; and yet she felt his kiss on her lips before the black clouds that had been hovering around her for so long swooped down like enveloping wings and carried her away with them.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CONVALESCENCE

THEY would not let her talk—would not let her ask the hundred and one questions that thronged to her lips; always they told her to lie still and try to sleep.

"I can't sleep," Cecelie protested weakly; tears swam in her eyes. "I keep wondering—wondering—if you'd only tell me what has happened."

Kathy bent over her; Kathy, very spick and span in her white cap and enveloping apron; Kathy with tears of gladness in her honest eyes.

"Darling—there's nothing to worry about—it's all going to end happily, like the fairy stories—only you've been so ill—you've given us all such a fright, Cecelie!"

"Ill?" Cecelie echoed the word anxiously. Her gray eyes, very large in her white face, sought Kathy's with a troubled expression.

"I can't have been very ill," she protested weakly. "Why, it was only last night—" She broke off with a little cry of remembrance.

Kathy sat down on the bedside and held Cecelie's hand, stroking it gently.

"You've been ill nearly a whole month, darling," she said gravely. "It's the first of December to-day."

"A — whole — month!" Cecelie's eyes dilated. "Then—then—Roger—" she faltered. "Oh, Kathy—"

"He's all right," said Kathy quickly. "At least—he will be as soon as you get well enough to take him away! A nice pair of invalids you'll be—it strikes me I shall have to come with you and look after you both!"

Big tears fell down Cecelie's white cheeks.

"You are cruel! How can you tease me—when you know—"

Kathy's face changed — her smile faded.

"Oh, darling — I thought you knew!" she cried in distress. "I thought you must have guessed that night—that—he was free!"

She went on rapidly.

"It was all so sudden — Mr. Buchanan brought you back home — do you remember? and you locked yourself in your room. You were ill then—you must have been half unconscious, because you never answered when we called to you—you never even answered *me!*

"We were so frightened — we thought you must be dead!" She kissed the hand lying in her own. "We wanted to tell you what had happened, Cecelie—we wanted to save you suffering any more. She had died that night, Cecelie — oh, poor, poor soul!"

Kathy's voice broke in a sob as she thought of Rosa Desmond—her glorious eyes and frail beautiful body.

"It was in her dressing room—the drapery she wore to dance in caught fire. They could have saved her if she hadn't been so frightened, but she lost her head and rushed out into the corridors. If she'd lived, all her beauty would have gone — her poor face—" Kathy stopped.

"We wanted to tell you—" she went on presently. "We tried to make you hear, but you didn't answer, and when they broke the door down you were past understanding. It was one o'clock in the morning—oh, the awful hours when we tried to make you hear! I thought you were dead even when Mr. Buchanan took you in his arms.

"Oh, Cecelie, you don't know how dreadful it all was! I've been here ever since; nobody else has nursed you—and now—oh, darling, you will hurry and get well, won't you? It's been so terrible to see you lying here day after day, and to hear you raving."

Kathy wiped away a tear that had trickled unromantically down the side of her nose.

Cecelie half smiled.

"And am I still in Louise's house?" she asked. "Poor Louise! How she must hate all the bother!"

Kathy sniffed expressively.

"She went away *ages* ago, bless

you! She's on the Riviera or somewhere with that spoiled kid Robbie. I hate that woman," she added viciously. "Even though she will be your sister-in-law—"

Cecelie's lips quivered; a faint flush suffused her white face.

"Don't!" she said weakly. "Oh, please don't!" There were tears in her voice, and Kathy kissed her remorsefully.

"I always was a blunderer," she said despairingly. "I won't say another word—and it's time you went to sleep."

She kissed Cecelie, tucked her up, and went away.

SHE awoke to hear Buchanan gently speaking her name. He dropped on his knees beside the bed and took her into his arms.

He laid his cheek to hers, and there was a long silence. Presently he turned her face gently till by the flickering firelight he could see her eyes.

"Have you forgiven me?" he asked shakily.

She moved her hand till it rested behind his head; then she pressed it gently downward with all her weak strength till their lips met.

"I never thought I'd ever kiss you again," he told her presently. "When Philip took you away from me that night it felt like the end of the world.

"Cecelie—you never cared for Forsyth, did you? I know I'm a brute to ask, but I can't *bear* to think that you ever—even for a moment—"

She laid her hand over his mouth.

"Oh, I never did—I never did! But he was kind to me, and I wanted some one to be kind to me. I used to shut my eyes sometimes when we were together and try to pretend it was you. I let him kiss my hand because—because *you* did that night—on the cliff. Do you remember? But it wasn't a bit the same; it wasn't a bit the same," she added quaveringly.

Buchanan passionately kissed the soft little hand that lay against his lips.

"You were better off than I was, sweetheart," he told her with a whimsical smile. "I only had my dreams—and then, when the doctors told me that—"

She stopped him with a little cry.

"Roger—you won't leave me now? We can go away together, abroad somewhere. You will get well!" She began to sob weakly.

"Don't, darling—don't cry, my sweet!" He kissed her again and again. "The best doctor in the world is happiness; we'll make a fight for it together, and, please God, we'll win—Cecelie!" His voice changed to feigned anger. "If you don't stop crying I shall have to fetch Kathy—and then she'll send me away!"

He laughed shakily. "I thought such a terrible threat would be sufficient," he added with a world of tenderness.

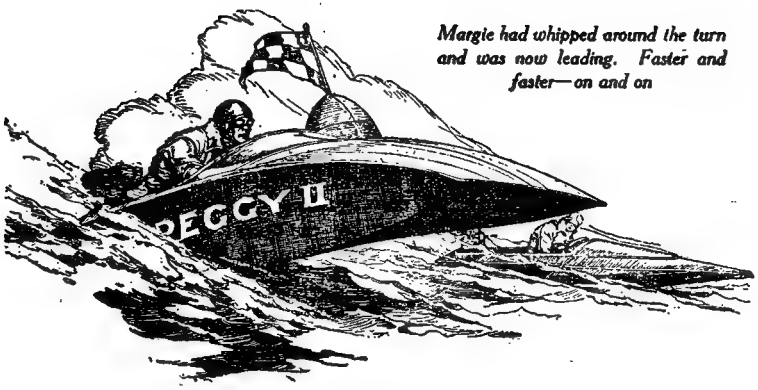
She tried to laugh, but in spite of her effort to prevent them the tears would creep in.

"It's only because I'm so weak," she apologized shamefacedly. "I don't cry as a rule—you know I don't." She ran her fingers through his hair.

"Oh, you'll see how I'll bully you when I get well, sir!"

"I want nothing better," he told her, "except"—his voice sank, and he drew her more closely into his arms—"except to call you my wife, sweetheart!"

The End



Margie had whipped around the turn and was now leading. Faster and faster—on and on

The Loser Who Won

By GENE GADDIS

THE moon, like a great golden ball, hung low in the star-splashed sky and smiled benevolently on the gayly dressed women and dinner-jacketed men who swayed to soft strains of music over the sunken dance floor in the patio of the Yacht Club. The fragrant orange trees were decorated with tiny golden bulbs to represent ripe fruit and colored spotlights had been turned on the tinkling fountain set in the center of the dance floor.

It was Margie Reynolds's first regatta, and instinctively she knew that to-night would be a night she would never forget. The lights, the soft music, the heavy fragrance of exotic flowers, coupled with the fact that she had just met the One Man, made it perfect.

She had seen him first that afternoon trying out the course in his tiny, high speed outboard, his black crispy hair tossed about his bronzed face. Just now, as she sat with her father, builder of the Reynolds Racing Sled, she had seen him again, and this time he was being piloted toward her table to be introduced. Their eyes met for a brief second, and in that flash each read a message of love.

Kerry Whitman! She let her eyes rest tenderly on him for a moment as he sat, momentarily engrossed in a discussion of motors and hulls with her father.

Every one was keyed up and tense for the morrow, when the starter's gun would send half a hundred of those speedy little outboards flashing around the mile course.

And with good reason.

Two weeks ago Wallace Harding, millionaire water sportsman, had announced his decision to buy a fleet of

racing sleds with which he hoped to capture the world's speed record for America in the coming international regatta to be held in Havana. He had also announced that the maker of the winning boat in the Miami Beach affair should be awarded the contract.

The contract in itself would not be the big thing, but the maker of the winning boat would gain much prestige. Every one would want a copy of the championship model.

The Reynolds Boat Works had been struggling along for the past six months, the sales barely enabling the proprietor to keep his head above water, and now Margie's father had staked his all on the hope of capturing first place in the outboard events. That Harding contract would put him on his feet.

THE musicians swung into a languorous waltz and Kerry turned to Margie.

"Won't you dance with me?" he asked, smiling.

She thrilled as she felt his strong arms about her and for a while remained silent, her eyes half closed. They seemed to drift in a world of gold and rose, a world occupied by just two people.

"You're—you're driving for J. H. Knowles, aren't you?" she asked at last, forcing herself to break the spell.

"Yes. He and your father were in business together once, weren't they?"

Margie nodded. "But they disagreed over some silly trifle and have been enemies ever since."

"Yes, I remember now. It was a darned shame to see that firm break up, too. They surely did build a dandy boat. Not," he hastened to add, "that the Reynolds boat isn't a fine one yet."

Margie smiled understandingly. "Poor old daddy hasn't had such an easy time since then," she said wistfully. "He has his heart set on a first place in the outboard class. He simply has to win!"

"I should say that with the pilot he has he should have a very good chance," Kerry replied soberly. "I was watching him this afternoon, and that boy can drive!"

The music finished and they made their way slowly back to the table where Mr. Reynolds sat watching them, a little half smile on his fine, sensitive features. Margie was intent on something Kerry was telling her when she saw his eyes flicker up and film over. He stopped speaking, and Margie turned to face Harvey Yates and a tall, darkly handsome young man.

"Good evening, everybody," Yates said heartily, "may I introduce a friend, James Keats?"

Margie had heard of Keats, who ranked just a notch or so below Harding himself, but this was the first time she had ever seen him. Her father had signaled a passing waiter for an extra chair, and Margie took this opportunity of studying the man. He was tall and slender, yet in some way he suggested strength. His straight, dark hair was brushed away from his forehead, and a carefully cropped mustache adorned his rather full upper lip.

He turned to smile at her, and she saw his eyes. Rather large for a man's and coal black. Deep in them Margie caught a glimpse of something that made her shiver involuntarily.

"Do—do you know Mr. Whitman, Mr. Keats?" she asked, indicating Kerry, who had stood during the entire introduction, his face set and the hand that rested on the chair back white-knuckled.

Keats glanced at Kerry indifferently.

"Oh! How are you?" he said casually.

"How do you do?" replied Kerry.

The girl was extremely puzzled at the attitude of the two men and would have hurried to fill the breach, but at this moment the band struck up again.

Couples began to take the floor.

"May I have the pleasure, Miss Reynolds?" Keats asked, smiling confidently.

"Oh! I'm sorry. I—I have this one," Margie faltered, laying a slim hand on Kerry's arm. In spite of Keats's handsome appearance and his easy bearing, she instinctively shrank from him. After Kerry's arms about her, any one else would be almost sacrilege.

"Why did you do that, Margie?" Kerry asked softly when they had danced halfway around the circular floor.

"Because I don't trust him somehow," replied Margie steadily. "You don't like him either, do you?"

"I suppose my feelings are pretty much yours. I don't exactly trust him, myself," answered Kerry. "He's rather a puzzle to all of us. There's never been anything that the judges could put their finger on, but he's won several times under—well, peculiar circumstances. Then," Kerry's voice hardened at the memory, "a—a buddy of mine was killed several years ago by one of Keats's drivers. The man turned in front of my buddy and the boat turned over on top of him."

"How awful," breathed the horror-stricken girl. "And nothing was done?"

"They suspended the driver for life and Keats gave ten thousand to the widow. They couldn't prove that Keats was involved. And that's," Kerry explained, "the reason I have no love for Mr. Keats!"

WHEN they again reached their table Keats had gone and Margie sank down in her chair with a feeling of relief.

"You're driving for Knowles, aren't you, young fellow?" Reynolds asked of Kerry. "A great old duck, but mulish." A note of grudging fondness had crept into his voice at the mention of his erstwhile business associate. "Then I guess you and I are in opposite camps, for I've set my mind on a Reynolds boat coming over the tape first."

"If we must be enemies, sir," Kerry begged, "let's be friendly enemies. This is the first race I've driven for Mr. Knowles, but he has promised me a big promotion at the factory if I win. And I don't mind saying that whoever beats that driver of yours will certainly know he's been in a race!"

Every minute Margie liked Kerry Whitman better. His clean, honest eyes and his high sense of sportsmanship went right to her heart. And the light she saw in his eyes when she surprised them on her was the sort that would send any girl's pulses pounding.

It seemed but a few minutes until the night had sped away and the musicians were packing up their instruments. It just couldn't be two o'clock in the morning and all that beautiful evening, with its moonlight, soft music and the perfume of exotic flowers a memory. But people were streaming out to parked cars, tossing gay good nights over their shoulders.

The outboard events were to be run off in three heats, one each day, and the driver winning two out of three would be declared the winner of the first prize for the meet.

The programs had announced that the first would be run the next afternoon at two thirty, and Kerry begged her to go swimming with him after the race. Margie hoped that she hadn't seemed too eager in her acceptance, but gosh! two thirty to-morrow seemed so far away! Twelve whole hours!

"Have a good time, honey?" her father asked as he backed their economical little car from the parking space and headed for their modest hotel.

"Um-mum, heavenly," she answered, dreamily, snuggling down into the car's upholstery.

Her father shot a keen glance at the girl beside him and spoke with studied carelessness.

"That young fellow—what's his name—you danced with all evening seemed a pretty nice boy."

"Kerry Whitman," she replied, "and he is nice."

A little smile lifted the corners of his mouth at her tone. He had liked Kerry immediately and was glad that he had seemed interested in Margie. Left motherless when a baby, her future and well-being had been a source of constant worry. He had admitted the fact that some day she would find the one man and would want to lead her own life. From his observations to-night, it seemed probable that this Whitman would play that rôle, and he was glad he was a boatman.

THE next afternoon Margie tripped happily into the modest boathouse her dad had rented. Fifteen minutes remained before the gun would boom that officially opened the regatta. The outboard events were first on the program, and Margie was surprised to find her father sitting disconsolately on an empty gasoline drum, and the Dart, the Reynolds entry, bobbing at its moorings just outside.

"Why, daddy!" Margie cried, dropping on her knees beside him. "What has happened? And where is Pat? He only has a few minutes, and the Dart isn't even warmed up!"

Wordlessly, he held out to her a yellow slip of paper. It was a telegram from a local hospital and said that Pat Donnelly, the high priced professional her father had hired to drive for him, had been hurt in an automobile accident and would be confined several days!

The world seemed to drop from beneath Margie's feet as the full import of the message struck her.

Fifteen minutes before the starter's gun and their driver hurt! Her dad, she knew, had sunk almost his last dollar in shipping expenses, entry fees and salary for this driver. There was no more money with which to hire another driver, and probably not another professional closer than Chicago or New York if there had been.

"I guess this is the end of the Reynolds Boat Works, honey," Mr. Reynolds said, lifting a haggard face and trying gamely to smile. "We will have to withdraw!"

"Oh, daddy, isn't there anything we can do?"

"I guess not, Margie," he replied. "I believe the Dart would have had a good chance, but without a driver—"

An idea, wild but possible, had been slowly taking shape in her mind. At least it was better than lying down; if the Reynolds Boat Works did pass out of existence, she wanted it to go out fighting.

"Daddy, why don't you let me drive?" she asked, trying to sound casual.

"What! You drive! Impossible!" Mr. Reynolds sputtered.

"I don't see what's so impossible about it. Haven't I been handling boats even since I could walk, almost? Of course, I couldn't do nearly so well as Pat, but it's a fighting chance!"

For a moment her father was too dumfounded at her proposal to answer, and Margie quickly pointed out that the entry fee was paid, the Dart floating outside, ready to go, and that there was a chance for her to win at least a small cash prize to help them with their expenses back home.

"But, Margie," her father protested when she had run out of breath, "women aren't allowed to compete in these events. There's a race later in the day for women drivers only!"

"Yes, but who cares about that? Even if you should win, you'd only get a silly little cup that you couldn't use! Oh, daddy, please let me. In bulky coveralls, goggles and a helmet, no one would ever know me. Please!"

Margie's dad had never been able to hold out against her for long, and now she saw that he was perceptibly weakening. Before he could solidify his defenses she made a headlong dash for the small dressing room in the back of the shed and hurriedly changed to a white linen coverall suit.

Mr. Reynolds was forced to admit, when she stepped back into view, that it would be hard to distinguish her from any other pilot at a distance. She looked now like an adorably small white teddy bear, but crouched in the small cockpit in the Dart's stern, with goggles and helmet, it would take keen eyes indeed to recognize her.

"Now, remember, young lady," her father admonished her sternly, "I'm letting you enter on condition that you take no chances, understand?"

Margie dropped a quick, happy kiss on his cheek and stepped into the Dart. Already the other boats were making their last practice run around the course. The Dart's sturdy motor caught the first time and with a flick of a gloved hand she steered the craft out into the waters of the bay.

All racing boats, no matter what their class, get away from a running start, gathering into some sort of formation a quarter of a mile from the starting line. They are supposed to keep an even line up to the starting tape by regulating their speed to that of the slowest contender. At the boom of the starter's gun each driver naturally sets the pace that suits him.

The eight outboards were turning now at the second buoy and lining up for the start. Margie discovered that Kerry had jockeyed his craft into a position next hers and was thrilled and elated at the implied compliment. Kerry had tacitly admitted that the Dart was the most dangerous contender and had maneuvered so as to be in position to watch it constantly.

They swept down on the starting line, motors half open and keeping a rough line, but as the starter's gun cracked Margie, with a deft twist, threw the little motor's accelerator full on and felt the sled leap ahead like a willing race horse whose reins have slackened.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw the square prow of the Peggy Second creep up an inch at a time until its driver, Kerry, was almost even with her. Down the stretch they raced, neither able to gain an inch. As they approached the curve it became apparent that Kerry hadn't the slightest intention of slowing for it, so with a stubborn set of her chin Margie, too, held the throttle open.

Both boats were hidden for a moment in a welter of spray as they tore around the buoys, literally "walking around" on their sterns, threatening at every moment to turn turtle. The watching sportsmen and spectators sat spellbound for the next few minutes watching the two mad humans risking their necks at every turn of the five laps. Down the stretch they went, motors howling, daylight showing at times between the keels and the choppy surface of the bay, then into a turn where the boats and drivers were invisible for seconds in the cascades of water their evolutions produced.

Kerry, in spite of his wild, reckless driving, was unable to gain another inch, and as the two boats flashed across the finish line a great cheer went up from the crowded grand stands. Auto horns and whistles from the yachts anchored in the infield were loosed in a wild outburst of acclaim. Margie had won the first heat.

AN hour later Margie and Kerry were lying at full length on the warm sands, talking over the race.

"Kerry, you were wonderful, but you really shouldn't take such chances," she told him. "I was sure you'd gone over on the third turn."

"That driver of your dad's certainly kept us all on our toes," Kerry replied, a grudging admiration in his voice. "But I decided if he could take those turns wide open, so could I. Who is he, anyway? He seems a darned unsociable beggar. I don't believe any of the drivers have seen him except when he was on the water."

"I—I—think he's in love," Margie said softly, "and the minute he's through he hurries off to be with the object of his devotion."

"Then I take it all back," Kerry said contritely. "I don't blame him a bit. But I almost wish he would get his mind on her so strong to-morrow afternoon that he'd absentmindedly slow down for a turn. Maybe I'd have a chance to nose him out, and I've simply got to take that heat to-morrow. If I don't, I'm afraid Knowles will withdraw."

"You mean he wouldn't let you run the final heat?" she asked, aghast at the prospect of Kerry being sent away from her.

"I'm afraid so," he replied soberly. "If I lose to-morrow I haven't a chance of winning first place. Of course, two second places and a possible third would mean a whale of a lot of points for the team, but you know how stubborn he is. He wants a clean first place or nothing."

For a moment she was silent, groping miserably for a solution to this tangle. For her father's sake and her own she *must* win, yet by so doing she would send the man she loved away, beaten and miserable.

She looked sidewise at Kerry and a flood of tenderness swept over her for this big, small boy who sat beside her, his naturally cheerful features overcast with gloom. She wanted so to take him in her arms, as she would a child, to ruffle his curly head and whisper that it didn't matter. But, instead, she smiled cheerfully and gave his hand a little pat.

"Don't worry," she begged. "I'm sure something will happen. He can't win all the time. Horrors," she cried, in mock alarm, "see the terrible influence you have over me. Here I sit, calmly talking treason. In another minute I'll be plotting with you against my own blood. Let's swim and forget the silly old race."

They raced laughing down the smooth beach and into the crystal blueness of the water. The rest of the afternoon was spent in discussing everything under the sun except motor boats. But when Kerry had dropped her, flushed and happy, at her hotel, his words came back to torment her.

She found her father waiting in the lobby, with a stern expression on his face that she had scarcely ever seen before.

"Now, see here, young lady," he said when he had drawn her to a chair in an isolated corner, "what do you mean by your wild, foolish driving this afternoon? You know boats, and especially these little light cockleshells, better than to force them on a turn. Have you forgotten Harkins?"

Margie shuddered at the mention of the name. Forget Harkins? Could she ever forget the face of her father's mechanic as he looked when they took him from the water? He had forced a sled on a turn, and by closing her eyes she could see the scene again as though it were yesterday. Harkins, coming into the turn, motor full on. Halfway around the boat had reared and seemed to stand on its tail a moment before it spun twice around and fell back on its driver.

No, she wouldn't forget Harkins soon.

"I—I—I'm sorry, dad," she answered in a small voice. "I guess I was excited this afternoon and I did so want to win. I promise not to do it again."

"You'd better not," he threatened again. "Of course I want you to win, if possible, but I'll not have you taking chances for all the regattas in the world. If I see you take one turn too fast I'll pull you out if it's the middle of the race. Understand?"

"Oh Kerry, isn't it marvelous!" she murmured

She nodded dumbly, quick hurt tears at her father's tone flooding her eyes.

"Good!" he said, the old *camaraderic* sweeping back into his face and voice. "I don't like to be hard with you, but you mustn't take unnecessary risks. Now, hurry up and wash your face and powder your nose for dinner."

While Margie made her preparations for the evening meal, her mind toyed with the thought her father had put there. What a wonderful way out he had unconsciously offered! If she obeyed him and took the turn under half power, Kerry, who would certainly take advantage of her caution, was sure to win. Immediately on the heels of this thought came a rush of shame.

"You rotten little quitter!" she told herself savagely. "Do you think that he would want to win that way? You can't let up like that. It means so much to you, either way, that you've simply got to play the game!"

Feeling a little better for her decision, she locked her door and descended the elevator to the lobby where her father waited. All through dinner she seemed preoccupied, lost in her thoughts, and her father very tactfully let her alone. He put her silence down to pique at his ultimatum and reasoned that she would be herself again by morning.

MARGIE came to the rented boathouse the next afternoon, already clad in the concealing folds of the coverall suit, with helmet and goggles in place, ready to compete in the second heat.

As yet she had no definite idea what she would do to insure Kerry's winning this heat. But she was quite positive that she would take the turn just as fast as he did. Her game, sport-loving heart despised a quitter above all else and she would never let down, even though it meant losing the one man in the world.

To-day, as yesterday, she found Kerry beside her as they came down the stretch to the starting line. They swept across, neck and neck, both motors turned up to the limit. Kerry had gained half a length by the time they reached the first turn, and Margie, with thoughts of Harkins in her tortured mind, prayed that he would slow down. Fifty feet from the red buoy she saw that he hadn't the slightest idea of doing this, and her heart almost stopped as she saw the frail boat rear up on its stern just as she remembered the other boat doing, long ago. But Kerry, with a quick, sure movement, threw his entire weight toward the bow and she saw it settle down safely once more as she sped by.

In the minute it took Kerry to steady his sled Margie had whipped around the turn and was now leading the Peggy Second by a scant three feet. Once around the course, twice, three times and their relative positions were unchanged. With a sinking feeling that was strange in the breast of a winning driver, Margie saw that it would be impossible for Kerry to make up that lost distance before they crossed the tape. But the thought of cutting her motor just a trifle never entered her head.

A hundred feet from the finish line on the home stretch, Margie's motor suddenly changed its tone from a full-throated roar to a series of weak coughs and sputters. A bit or trash, probably, had lodged for a moment in the carburetor, causing the motor to miss. It lasted but a fraction of a minute, yet that was enough to enable Kerry, close behind her, to tear across the line, winner by inches.

Margie could have screamed with joy as she saw the scarlet prow pull past. Once more the air rang with cheers and whistles, but this time they were for Kerry, and she was glad. At least she would have another day with him, and of course now that he had a

first and second place he would stay for the presentation ball. He was assured now, even if he didn't win the final heat to-morrow, of some sort of trophy.

"I'm sorry, dad," she said, as she guided the tiny boat up to the boathouse they had rented. "I wanted to win for you."

"Sorry? Don't be foolish," he returned heartily. "You're making me the proudest man in the world with your show of gameness. You're running rings around all the other drivers, and you'd have won to-day if your motor hadn't quit. Forget it, honey, you've got a wonderful chance to win to-morrow. And what if you don't? You have tried and done your best like a little trooper, and no one can do more than that!"

She threw a smile of deep love and gratitude to the man who stood consoling her while practically his whole life hung in the balance of to-morrow's race. If she had won to-day, she told herself, his suspense would now be over. He would no doubt be awarded the contract and his future made secure. On the other hand, Kerry would probably be packing his things to slip out of her life, beaten and disheartened.

"You don't mind if I hurry along, do you?" she asked, trying to master a guilty feeling of having let her father down. "I—I—have sort of an engagement."

"Whitman? Of course I don't mind, honey," he answered, understandingly. "Run along and enjoy yourself; you deserve it."

IN her room she dressed slowly, her mind in a turmoil. A pang shot through her at the thought of her dad telling her earnestly "it didn't matter," while he stood on the brink of financial disaster.

If he lost the Harding contract he stood a very good chance of seeing the factory, a thing he had watched grow under his hands from a small shed in his own back yard to a long, airy building employing a dozen men, pass out of existence. Of seeing his beloved boats disappear from the lakes and streams, wherever racing meets were held, all over the country.

He had shown his great love for her by his willingness to sacrifice himself. Why couldn't she be loyal?

But loyal to whom? Her dad, or Kerry, her heart?

She shook herself and determined to think no more of her problem for the present.

This was her hour with Kerry, and it seemed almost a sacrilege to allow anything to mar it.

Kerry was waiting at the curb when she came down, his face flushed and eager, behind the wheel of his hired roadster.

"I'm awfully sorry about the Dart's engine trouble this afternoon," he said when he had helped her into the seat beside him. "But since it happened, I'm glad I won."

"So am I, Kerry," she replied soberly. "If we must lose, I'd much rather it be to you than to any one else."

"Let's not talk any more for a while, do you mind?" he asked, busy with the traffic that hurried on both sides. "There's something I want to talk to you about, and I know just the place for it."

Margie was quite content with this arrangement and snuggled down beside him, steadfastly refusing to let her mind dwell on boats or anything pertaining to them.

Kerry turned the car into the boulevard that ran along the ever restless ocean and drove for several minutes in silence. A narrow lane, its unpaved dustiness seeming incongruous in this land of broad concrete highways, led off from the left and this Kerry took, steering the car expertly down its bumpy surface. A line of majestic Australian pines reared their lofty heads on either side and, joining, made a cool, beautifully green tunnel. It was inexpressibly lovely.

The road made a long, graceful turn and around it Kerry stopped the car and set the brakes.

"Kerry—it's—it's heavenly!" the girl beside him breathed, her lips parted and her eyes aglow.

Over a tangle of breast-high cane the azure waters of Biscayne Bay spread before them, not a roof-top in sight to mar the illusion of solitude. A mocking bird in the underbrush, taking the car's arrival for his cue, began singing his heart out in a pæan to nature. A few feet from the shore a flock of pure white herons stood, poised on one leg, while they eyed the humans reproachfully.

"I knew you'd like it," Kerry answered. "It reminds me of you. So beautiful it hurts and sort of—of—clean!"

He leaned over and took both her hands in his.

"Look at me, darling," he commanded. "I love you, Margie, and have from the first moment I saw you. It's been agony not telling you this before, but I felt that I hadn't the right. Winning to-day has given me a fighting chance to take this race, and with your love before me I can't lose! Say that you love me, darling, do!"

"Of course I love you, Kerry," Margie answered steadily, looking into his eyes bravely. "Surely you have felt it all along."

Wordlessly he took her into his arms and kissed her eyes, her cheeks, and the little hollow at the base of her throat, and then at last her lips.

"Then you'll marry me if I win to-morrow?" he asked, happily. "It will mean a big promotion and lots more money to buy you things."

"But, Kerry, sweetheart, why let the silly race influence us?" she cried wearily. "I love you and you want me, so what else matters? What possible difference could it make if you lost? I hate women who aren't willing to help the men they love!"

"I couldn't ask you to marry me on my present salary," he said firmly.

Something in his tone convinced her of the futility of further argument, and she raised her shoulders in a helpless little shrug.

"I'm tired, Kerry," she said in a small voice. "Take me home, won't you?"

IN SPITE of her determination to think no more of boats and racing, she joined her father in the boathouse the next afternoon pale and wan from an almost sleepless night.

"What's wrong, Margie?" her father cried, alarmed at her appearance. "Are you ill, child?"

"I'm all right, dad," replied the girl, smiling bravely. "It's the strain of fighting for the family fame and fortune, I suppose."

In spite of his protests Margie settled herself in the cockpit of the Dart and guided it into the course. Most of the other entries were already out and skimming around the course in practice rounds, so the white-faced girl fell in line, expertly adjusting the tune of her motor. Twice around the course

she sped, the salt breeze in her face partly reviving her and bringing back a sparkle to her eyes.

Dully a gun boomed and she looked to see the five minute flag flying from the judge's stand. Under half throttle she turned her boat's nose back up the course to where the outboards were beginning to form into a rough line.

As before, she found the Peggy Second's red painted hull next, and just beyond a racer she recognized as being one of the two entered by Keats. Thirty feet from the starting tape Kerry raised a hand to her in a gesture of good luck and managed a smile. The driver of Keats's boat sat hunched over the controls, intent on the business in hand. Margie's heart swelled with pride and love for the man who was so inherently a sportsman that he could wish another luck in a contest that meant so much to him.

To the ardent racing fans who lined the shore the race had narrowed in interest to the two daring drivers who had shown such nerve and skill in the two previous heats, and a great cheer went up as, immediately upon crossing the line, grim battle set in among the three boats for the lead.

For three laps the tense struggle lasted, neither driver able to gain the lead and hold it for more than a few feet. A wild, breath-taking skid around the buoys, motors wide open and screaming, then into the straightaway, inches of daylight showing for seconds at a time between the hulls and the choppy waters of the bay.

The spectators realized that this race was an epic, something they would marvel at and remember for years. When it seemed that strained nerves must crack and the demoniac pace slacken the three swept into the home stretch, past the judge's platform on the last lap. Unconsciously, the pilots crouched lower in the cockpits and motors were turned up to the last ounce of power.

In the next short mile a break must come for one of them; something *had* to happen!

The relative positions were unchanged; Margie, on the outside of the course, with Kerry next and the Keats boat on the inside. A quick glance over her shoulder showed Margie another boat hovering a scant fifty feet behind them.

Owing to the shorter arc the Keats boat was forced to turn in order to clear the buoys the driver had consistently gained a few feet at each turn of the course.

But up to now he had been unable to hold it.

Sweeping into the turn that would bring them into the back stretch and a scant half mile from the finish Margie saw the black prow of the Keats outboard gaining, inch by inch. Halfway around, and in the space of a split second, a scream of horror burst from her lips as the black outboard, instead of holding to the turn, cut directly in front of Kerry's bow!

In a flash she saw that by cutting his motor Kerry could get clear of a crash and pass behind the boat, but that at her speed nothing could prevent a smash-up.

Setting her teeth hard, she closed her eyes and prepared herself for the rending collision, but the next second she heard the wild roaring of racing motors and the scraping, tearing sound of wood meeting wood.

She opened her eyes and as she flashed by saw that Kerry, instead of cutting behind the Keats entry, had stubbornly held to his course and had struck the black craft amidships with

all the force of which the tiny boat was capable.

The picture was instantly clear in her mind. Kerry, clean to his finger tips and hating a cheat, had sacrificed his chances to win to give her a clear stretch of water! Her man, her lover had done this for her, thrown away in a second his prospects for promotion and, so he thought, the girl he loved! And what was she to do about it?

Her father's words came back to her, "Women are not allowed to compete in this event!" That was the solution to the puzzle at last!

Kerry had somehow managed to right his ship and was tearing down the back stretch, eating up the distance that separated them, but it was apparent to all that he could hope for no better than a close second. Margie, her face radiant now that she had discovered an honorable way out, watched the judge's arm closely as it held aloft the flag that would proclaim her winner..

As it descended, with one deft movement she swept the linen helmet from her head and allowed her tawny hair to billow out behind her! She had won, proving the supremacy of Reynolds boats. But the next moment she had been disqualified, making Kerry the official winner! She was tired, desperately tired, but happy, and with a hand that trembled she steered the Dart to its moorings at the boathouse.

THE same golden moon smiled down on the Miami Beach Yacht Club, but the boy and girl who wandered arm in arm in the shadows were oblivious of the music that marked the final regatta ball.

They stopped in a secluded spot and looked around to be sure they were unobserved. Then the boy took her in his arms and kissed her hungrily.

"Isn't it marvelous, Kerry?" Margie whispered when she was once more able to speak. "Daddy and Mr. Knowles are friends and partners again, the Harding contract awarded them, and—and us and, oh! everything?"

"It's great!" agreed Kerry happily. "And I'm to captain Harding's team in Cuba before I go to the factory as consulting engineer! Darling, even if you are the unofficial holder of the world's outboard record for women, do you think you could make my happiness complete by honeymooning with me in Havana?"

And now, if you are a devotee of water racing, you may see on your program that the woman's speed record for outboards, set at Miami Beach and approved three months later, is held by Mrs. Kerry Whitman.

UNBELIEF

I THOUGHT: "What folly to dream one soul might know
Mine to its deeps, without a sign to show
The windings of that maze!"
But it was so.

I said: "No love could be to *my* life a flame,
Illumining the letters of one name
So that is spelled sun, moon, stars!"
And you came. —*Lesley Grey*

"A man had given all other bliss to waste his whole soul in one kiss upon her perfect lips"

The Perfect Kiss

By LEE SHIRLEY

THE old clock wound up like a big league pitcher and struck twelve. A log broke and splintered in a shower of golden sparks. The firelight played softly over the deserted living room of the tavern—deserted except for the long, smoke-wreathed gentleman in the wing chair.

Harrison Wynne was having a last pipe before bedtime.

He straightened up, listening. Had he heard a door open upstairs; a step, cautious, stealthy? Nonsense! Everybody was in bed long ago. He ran his hand through his short, crisp hair, settled back comfortably.

There it was again! No mistake this time: some one was creeping down the hall. A light flickered—

He got to his feet, grabbed the poker, waited in the black shadow of the stairs.

Another step. A light on the landing—a slender white hand curved round the banisters. Dark hair curling over white shoulders, white negligee sweeping behind her, candle uplifted, a woman was coming slowly down.

The man watching below felt a slight prickling at the back of his neck: *the Woman in White.*

Good Heavens! Of course he had never believed this ghost story of the tavern, but—

She was coming straight toward him. With slow, measured step she advanced; he flattened himself against the wall.

She stopped. For a moment she stood; then with an exquisite gesture raised her face as if to the kiss of a lover.

Harrison drew in his breath sharply, feeling himself drawn irresistibly to that white, lovely face. He stooped and kissed her.

But the lips under his were not at all ghostly. They were warm and soft.

A shiver ran over her slender body; she turned. Eyes straight ahead in a fixed stare, she went slowly up the stairs again.

"Well, I'll be damned," said Harrison Wynne.

THE next morning Miss Dena Lee Mason, called Denalee (all one word), walked down the steps and into the blue and gold of a perfect mountain day.

She was surrounded by mountains, the Blue Ridge. Near by the rolling hills were dotted with the darker green of apple trees, and the air, fresh from the heights, warm with the sun, was sweet with the breath of the apples.

"Goodness," Denalee thought, as she scrambled up the hill, "you don't have to eat apples up here. You just inhale 'em!"

She smiled, for there was the fort! Topping one of the mountains a gray stone pile blurred against the sky, a flag standing out to the wind.

Could that be Robert Barclay's place? She stopped, awed by its magnificence. He had not wanted her to see it until it was finished—well, she could hardly wait now.

She had known Robert for years, but only lately had she realized how she had come to depend on him. And at last it had dawned on her that she might marry him—some day.

He wanted her to fix that "some day" as a definite date in the fall.

And so they had left it. Denalee's lips twisted. It was so like him to wait four years and then rush her into a speedy marriage!

In this her mother was his able second. And that was the reason, too, for her mother's consent to this pilgrimage to Aunt Dena's tavern — Aunt Dena for whom she was named—her little-girl dream of romance. She had played at being Aunt Dena since her curls were long enough to tuck up, and her mother's skirts long enough to trail behind.

She picked up an apple, and munching contentedly, strolled back down the road. To think that she was here, at last, where Aunt Dena Lee had held her dying lover in her arms while he claimed that perfect kiss—

Suddenly she jumped. A truck towering with barrels had come careening round the curve, and missed her by inches.

"Wh-ew—" she breathed. "One more like that and somebody else 'll be holding a dying woman in his arms!"

Somewhat subdued, she trotted back to the tavern, went up the steps and into the long, low-ceiled living room. Mrs. Gardner, who kept the place, rustled in, tall, gray-haired, black-taffetaed.

"Good morning, my dear." Her voice was low and sweet. "I hope you slept well?"

"Very, thank you, but I had the most vivid dream of Aunt Dena Lee."

"You had her room. They say she sometimes returns."

"Dear Mrs. Gardner" — Denalee

wrinkled up her pose—"is that coffee? I'm starved!"

"Very well." She led the way to a small table adorned with fried apples, broiled Virginia ham, and biscuits that looked too fluffy to be real.

"This certainly does look good!" Denalee was hungry with the appetite of her twenty-four healthy years.

Mrs. Gardner helped herself to the smallest known biscuit, and nibbled it daintily. Denalee took one uneasy look at her, then went right on. To-morrow, maybe, she'd try to nibble, but to-day joy and breakfast just had to be unrefined.

MRS. GARDNER caressed her lips with her napkin. "Do you know, my dear, you remind me of your great aunt Dena Lee?"

"Oh, do you think so?" Denalee smuggled another biscuit—she did hope Mrs. Gardner wasn't counting how many she had eaten.

"Yes," her hostess went on, "you have her coloring, that same red-brown hair—I'm glad it isn't bobbed—or at least not quite." She touched a curl back of Denalee's ear. "And you have her eyes, those amber eyes, with—how shall I put it?—that questing look."

Denalee laughed and annexed a second piece of ham. "It's that 'questing' spirit that brought me here. All my life I've wanted to see the old tavern. By the way," she broke off, "is that Robert Barclay's place on top of the mountain?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"Yes, indeed, we're old friends."

"That's very fortunate—for him."

Denalee looked up at the tone. "You mean he isn't popular here?"

"Well, he's a stranger—"

"A stranger? Why, he's owned an orchard here for years!"

"If he had lived here all his life he'd not be one of us." Mrs. Gardner's thin lips looked thinner. "His ways are not our ways. My dear"—she fixed Denalee with her pale blue eyes—"one must have standards!"

"Yes, of course." Denalee was rather vague.

"I wonder if you know, my dear, that we are related? You see, your grandfather Mason and my half-brother—" She began to relate family history.

At the first breathing space Denalee struggled back to her Aunt Dena's story: "And it was here, at the foot of the steps that the duel—"

"Yes. If you are through we will go into the other room." Mrs. Gardner undulated into the hall and the girl followed in the black taffeta wake.

"I want you to see some of my antiques." And Mrs. Gardner launched forth on a conversation filled with period furniture.

But Denalee found her attention, and her eyes, straying to the fireplace, where a dark head poked over the top of the chair, and a russet boot poked over the brass fender. In between there was a blue haze of tobacco smoke—good smoke, too, she decided. She started as Mrs. Gardner stopped suddenly.

"And it was here in this room that the duel—" She caught at Aunt Dena's story again.

"Yes, at the foot of the steps, yonder. She held the candle while they fought."

Denalee thought she saw the black head move in the chair. "And then her lover died in her arms."

"I'm expecting Mr. Barclay," the girl said then. "Will you call me

when he comes?" And she skipped upstairs.

IN a very few minutes Mr. Barclay arrived. He was in an underslung car that sounded like a French poodle but looked like a German dachshund.

Robert S. Barclay, *the* Mr. Barclay of Barclay and Co., Inc., knew just who he was. Perfectly tailored clothes, slightly graying hair, long, black cigar.

When Denalee came down, he held her hand a moment, then smiled charmingly, and led her to his car.

"I've been looking for you every day for weeks," he said as he climbed in beside her.

"I hoped to come before, but some way—you know, Robert, I adore it up here. I could just hug the mountains!" And she flung out her arms.

"How about me?" He leaned toward her. "That was an awfully formal greeting I got at the tavern!"

"Silly!" Denalee gave him a push. "With Mrs. Gardner looking on? And that reminds me — she told me that was your place on top of the mountain. It's marvelous, Robert. I'm wild to see it—"

"Well, I've been waiting for days to show it to you, though it isn't quite finished even yet. I wanted to surprise you."

"Did I come too early, after all?"

"Not for me. I'm impatient for you." His hand closed over hers. "And as it happens it's the most interesting time of all. We're picking apples."

She drew her hand away. "You know I've wanted to come up here for years, but mother never would consent to it before. I'm incurably romantic."

"You can afford to be. Now with me—" He slowed down for a truck load of barrels, towering white against the sky.

"But how can you help it, up here?" Denalee's face was glowing. "Why, your very business, marketing these apples of Hesperides— They have actually turned to gold for you, haven't they?"

"Not quite!" He had to stop for a cart, piled high with red and yellow apples.

"Culls," he explained, "on the way to the cider mill. Not worth the haul, but these mountaineers keep on doing the same thing in the same way their fathers and grandfathers did. I'm here to teach them better. But they consider me an intruder. There's one fellow—and the others all swear by him, and follow his lead—who's just about got my goat." His mouth set, and his knuckles whitened on the wheel. "But I'm going to get him."

Denalee was startled at the tone, passionless, cold, final.

"But Robert, that sounds ruthless—"

"Ruthless? Oh, I don't know! He's in my way."

Almost immediately the car swung in through a stone gateway. A sun-flecked stream gurgled along by the side of the road, wetting the trailing willows, swinging lazily above.

"Welcome to Primrose Farms," he said.

"It's lovely, Robert!" she told him enthusiastically. "Shall we walk up to the house?"

"No, we'll drive. But I want you to see my plant."

They turned toward an old stone building, a mill of other days, the wheel dripping moss now instead of water. From inside came the whir of machinery.

In the center of the building was

the grader, the huge canvas hopper at the top, a greedy maw waiting for the apples that stood about in crates and barrels and boxes. Wagons were unloading outside, trucks coming down the hill in an endless chain from the orchards.

"Turn on the switch, Jamieson," Barclay ordered.

At once the grader started up and a stream of apples poured out. A red, shining sheet of apples, turning, twinkling, rolling down to the holes at the bottom. Here they fell into place, the little ones into the little holes, the larger ones settling themselves with an important "switch."

Denalee watched, fascinated. The flowing crimson band swept on.

Laughter they heard, and snatches of song, but could see no one. "Where are they?" asked Denalee

"Like fate, isn't it?" She turned to Barclay. "Only a kinder fate that doesn't put a square peg in a round hole."

The man's eyes darkened.

"Fate doesn't put them there." His

jaw set. "Every man makes his own place, and he eventually finds it."

AS they strolled back under the trees, Denalee picked up an apple and started to bite it. "Goodness, it's hard!"

"You bet it is! That's where my storage plant comes in. I'll store them, and when they come out they'll be fine, and bring a fine price."

"And if you haven't a storage plant?"

"Then you're out of luck—unless you can pay our charges. That's where we have the advantage over the little fellow—we can afford to wait. Very often he can't."

"I see. The sun falls alike on the little apple and the big one, but not on the little man and the big."

"Not quite."

"And I thought you just planted the trees and picked the apples! But it is business after all."

"You bet it's business — big business!"

They got back into the car and Denalee spoke musingly. "And so next winter when I see these boxes of apples—red and yellow jewels—it will be like gazing into a magic crystal. I'll see purple velvet mountains, goldenrod foaming down the sides, orchards sweeping over the hills, and the air sweet with millions of apples!"

"And I," Barclay said, "will see my men here, the trucks, the barrels, the boxes, the storage plant, the commission man, my profit."

"And there we are—" Denalee spread her hands, "you are a realist, while I—"

"You are yourself." His arm went about her shoulder, lingered there. "I would not have you different."

The girl was quiet, very quiet.

As they drew up at the tavern, Barclay spoke regretfully. "See here, Denalee, I'm sorry as the devil, but I've got to be in New York to-morrow and next day—"

"Oh!" She made a little face at him. "And I can't see the castle!"

"Not until I come back. I want to show it to you myself." He was more enthusiastic than she had ever seen him. "So how about dining with me Wednesday night—say about eight?"

"I can't wait!" Denalee laughed as she hopped out.

"And I can't wait—and I'm not going to—much longer." He did not touch her—only smiled. But Denalee wished he wouldn't—not like that.

As he slid down the drive, he turned and waved at her. The car glittered opulently in the sunshine.

Denalee sighed as she turned slowly toward the house. She wondered how it felt to be rich; she knew how it felt to be poor.

On her way upstairs, after luncheon, Mrs. Gardner stopped her. "Did you have a pleasant morning, my dear?"

"Oh, yes, thanks—very."

At her words the dark head in the usual big chair moved. So did the brown boots, and a surprising length of corduroy-clad gentleman in between.

"You haven't met Miss Mason, Harrison?" Mrs. Gardner answered the pleading in the eloquent gray eyes. "My dear," she arrested Denalee's upward flight, "I want to present Mr. Wynne."

Denalee came down a step, Harrison went up one, and their smiles met.

"You know, Harrison," Mrs. Gardner began, "this child's grandfather and my half-brother—" She was off.

Harrison looked into the eyes above him and saw an answering twinkle.

Denalee finally made a break in the conversation and he dashed into it.

"I wonder if you ride, Miss Mason?"

"Of course she does!" Mrs. Gardner answered. "Who ever heard of a Mason who didn't? Excuse me, there's some one at the door."

"As I was saying," Harrison grinned, "I'm going up to the top orchard this afternoon, and if you don't mind a climb I think you'd be interested. The pickers are there, and it's rather a pretty sight. I wish you would," he finished boyishly.

"I wish I could." Denalee was very serious. "But the trouble with riding is that one usually needs a horse."

"But if one"—Harrison laid a hand on his heart—"has two?"

"Fine!" said Denalee.

II

TRIM and boyish in her tweed riding clothes, with a tiny red feather stuck in her soft felt hat, Denalee got into the saddle easily. "I just know you've given me your own horse! What's his name?"

Harrison swung up. "Royal. And a fit mount for you, Princess Redfeather."

Denalee bowed. "Thanks, kind sir. I'm so happy to meet him. You know, to me, a horse is the only proper means of transportation up here."

"That's the way I feel. I still raise a few horses, too—tradition, I suppose. Though that is passing with other things—"

"What a pity!"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm beginning to wonder if we haven't overdone some of that stuff. What is there, after all, to tradition?"

"Well, anyway," Denalee told him, "tradition brought me up here."

"Then I'm for it, strong!" he said enthusiastically.

"You've heard the story of my greataunt Dena Lee?"

"Once or twice." He grinned.

Denalee laughed. "Mrs. Gardner does rather rub it in, doesn't she? Well, you know Aunt Dena dared to take her happiness—"

"And the gentleman who took the dare got shot!" Harrison's teasing eyes held hers.

"Well, he died in a good cause, and a beautiful lady's arms."

"And then there was the perfect kiss." Harrison looked at her adoringly. "You haven't forgotten that, have you?"

Her color deepened. "Well, anyway," she hurried on, "Aunt Dena is the peach on our family tree, and I love her spirit. Sometimes I think I *am* her spirit."

They rode a few minutes in silence; then, "Here we are," he said.

He dismounted at the old horse block and threw the reins over the hitching post—an iron horse's head wearing a perpetual grin. They climbed over a stile to the orchard.

All around the trees were bending to the ground, heavy and sweet with apples.

Laughter came to them, snatches of song, some one whistled; but not a soul was in sight.

"Where are they?" Denalee was puzzled.

She looked up. Grinning at her, white teeth shining, small black boys were hanging in the branches like monkeys.

She burst out laughing.

"Hey, Sam," Harrison called to the largest boy, "how you coming—everything all right?"

"Yassir!" Sam positively beamed

at Harrison—they all seemed to adore him—"us got apples, what I mean!"

Farther on a group of girls were picking, their gay cotton gowns clustered like flowers round the trees.

"I want to show you the upper orchard," said Harrison. "Are you equal to a climb?"

"Try me!"

He pulled down the bars of the wooden fence, and they went up a rocky old, red clay road, then turned off into the woods. Here trees hung low, there was the damp sweetness of ferns, and the leaves rustled under their feet.

"Now tell me," Denalee began, "all about the apple business."

"A large order," Harrison laughed. "It's a mighty uncertain business—has been ever since Adam took that little flyer in apples. Sometimes we don't have a fifty per cent crop, and big prices, and when we have a bumper crop we can hardly give them away."

"It sounds absolutely hopeless! Doesn't it ever pay?"

"It used to, but the little man is being squeezed out. And it is the little man I'm interested in."

"My godfather says," Denalee cut in, "that a land of small farmers is a contented land."

"Right! Your godfather must be a man of sense."

"He has to be," Denalee explained. "He's the president of the Valley Trust Company."

"Well, he's dead right about the small farmer. But if things keep on going the way they are, we won't have many of them. They simply can't compete with the big orchards, electrical machinery and all that."

Denalee nodded. "The apple factory. I was at Primrose Farms this morning. Do you know Robert Barclay?"

"Yes, I know him!" Harrison cut at a bush savagely. "He controls the storage plants, and we can't afford to pay his prices, and we can't sell at the small figure we get without storing, so—" He shrugged, but the lines about his mouth tightened. "But enough of business!"

They crossed a gurgling stream, scrambled over another gate, then climbed straight up the mountain to the orchard.

Again they were surrounded by an army of apple trees. Great piles of apples heaped about, red and green, and barrels and boxes everywhere.

Harrison went over to speak to some of the pickers, and the girl went on up the mountain.

All the way up she went, not looking back once. At the top she turned. Spread below her was the Rockfish Valley, a mighty patchwork of green and brown and golden yellow, the white cottages laced together with the scarlet thread of the red clay road.

The mountains, velvet soft, folded away till they were just a deeper blue in the sky. The afternoon sun fell warm and sweet.

Denalee turned to find Harrison at her side. His eyes caught hers, and he smiled.

"That's the way I feel, too," he said.

He dropped down beside her on the warm, dry ground. "You know I love all this—the very smell of the earth. And that's, I suppose, the reason I stick on."

"With the apple tree army?"

"You said it—and it's some battle right now! The age-old war of the survival of the fittest, and Robert Barclay getting fitter every minute!" He

gave a short laugh. "But it's a hold-up," he went on bitterly, "money or your life! Money to him, but to us it's life."

Denalee started to speak, took one look at his smoldering eyes—and did not.

In a few moments he turned to her. "Mind if I smoke?"

She smiled—most men would have offered her a cigarette—then watched him fill his pipe. Yes, he was a part of all this: the corduroy clothes, the high-laced boots, the broad-brimmed felt hat, the gray flannel shirt, and a tie that no "gentleman" would wear.

The match flared. There were lines about his mouth, rather deep ones, but his face was the face of a dreamer.

There was the comforting puff-puff of his pipe.

"You know," she said, "I have a longing for the top apple on the top branch of the top tree—"

"You would!" Harrison laughed. "No halfway measures about the Dena Lees. Come on."

He gave her a hand and they scrambled up. He swung himself into a tree. "Here you go!"

Denalee caught the apple neatly. "What a beauty!"

"Yes, I have some fine apples this year. They should bring a fancy price, but—"

"Anyway," she broke in, "I know this will be the sweetest."

"Funny thing," he told her, "the ones on top the mountain *are* the sweetest. That's why we string our orchards along the sky this way."

They were halfway down when Denalee darted off. "Beat you to the bottom!"

Harrison's long legs soon caught up with her, however, and almost together they wound up at the gate. Breathless, laughing, happy, they ran down the road like children, hand in hand.

He helped her over the last fence, slid the rail back in place, then turned to her. "Like it?"

"Love it," she said.

TWO sunsets later, days when the sun and wind, the blue mountains and white clouds, the green orchards and Harrison Wynne had done their best to charm the very heart out of her, Denalee was dressing for dinner.

Her thoughts were somewhat low. Briefly, Robert Barclay. She knew he was going to insist on settling their wedding date—and she had never felt less "settly."

She jerked at the ribbon in her green crêpe "underall." It broke, of course. She sighed. Her mother said that was her trouble, she never wanted to settle to anything. Perhaps she was right.

For all the years Denalee could remember, ever since her father died, her mother had been engaged in that genteel horror known as *keeping up appearances.*

Makeshifts, making over, managing.

Somehow Denalee had been brought up, and now it was expected that *she* would "manage."

She leaned closer to the mirror, curled her hair back of her ears, twisted the ends at the nape of her neck. That was better. Lipstick, rouge—she laid down the powder puff. Her brooding eyes looked back at her so seriously that she forced a smile. She hated "droopy" people! And she had made her decision.

Five minutes later her green taffeta was frilling down the steps and Harrison Wynne rose to meet her.

"Oh, you are going out?" His face

fell as he spied the wrap on her arm.

"Yes." Denalee slipped down to the settle by the log fire. "I'm dining at Primrose Farms."

"I see." His voice dropped eloquently; then he smiled his admiration. "You make me think of what I was just reading." He picked up a Tennyson from the arm of his chair, flipped over a page:

"A gown of grass green silk she wore,
Buckled with golden clasps before;
A light-green tuft of plumes she bore,
Closed in a golden ring."

"Pretty, pretty!" Denalee swept open her jade feather fan, provocative eyes smiling over the top. "What's the rest?"

"A man had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly worth for this,
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips."

Quiet. Only the soft flutter of the flames, logs whispering together.

Denalee looked up, then down. Harrison's deep set eyes were on her. She knew then that she had been playing, but he had not.

The door opened. A rush of cold air and Robert Barclay entered.

"Hello, there," Denalee smiled a greeting, slid into her short velvet coat as he came across the room. "You know Mr. Wynne?"

"I do." He nodded curtly.

Harrison's nod was equally curt. "We know each other, I think." The tone was velvet, his eyes were steel.

"Are you ready?" Robert Barclay strode over to the door; held it open, and Denalee passed through.

He put her into the car, climbed in himself, and threw in the clutch. As they slid down the hill he turned on her accusingly. "I didn't know you knew Harrison Wynne."

"I just met him when I came up here."

"He didn't look as if he'd just met you! See here, Denalee, I hope you're not going to make a friend of this fellow—I detest him."

Denalee looked at him. "Surely he isn't the man you told me about, the one you're going to 'get'?"

"And if he is?" he parried.

"Oh, I hope you won't do that." Her voice was warm with feeling. "He's a fine fellow, really—you've misunderstood him, I'm sure." Impulsively she laid a hand on his arm.

Robert Barclay covered the hand with his own, and when he spoke it was in his usual suave tone. "Let's not spoil our evening with him."

"But really—" Denalee began.

"I've been looking forward to this for weeks, your first visit to my—our—home." He smiled into her eyes.

With an effort she returned the smile and shut back the words that fairly burned her tongue.

"Just one more turn," he told her, "and we are there."

And so they were. A huge pile loomed ahead. Denalee looked back. "Why, I'd no idea we'd been climbing so!"

"Yes, we're pretty high here. You can see both sides of the mountain." He held out both hands. "Welcome to Primrose Farms, my dear."

DENALEE had never seen him in a more softened mood. She responded at once and laid her hand in his. Together they went up the rough stone steps.

A medieval castle. Great stone arches loomed; the rooms stretched away in dim vistas, lighted with golden-shaded lamps. The soft warmth of tapestry colored the walls—a suit

of armor—huge flower stands holding blooms that reached to the ceiling.

Denalee dropped her wrap, and almost immediately dinner was announced. Afterward there was bridge, and at last she and Robert Barclay

"Why, Denalee, my dear—what is it?" Robert's voice was concerned as he bent over, gathered her close, closer—

She gave herself into his arms. For a long moment she rested there, felt

Denalee twisted out of his arms. "No—no, I can't!" she breathed

slipped away from the others. They stood together on a stone balcony that jutted out over the valley. She looked down. There was a sheer drop of two hundred feet—she felt she was hanging in space.

The mountains were black mysteries; moonlight poured down on the silvery mists below.

And then she felt herself swaying. "Oh-h—" She shuddered back from the edge.

his kisses on her shoulder, her neck, her hair. And then he reached for her lips.

She raised her face to his. And out on the still night air there came twelve silver strokes as the clock chimed.

She drew back. "Oh, no—no. I—I can't—"

"Why, my dear"—he only held her closer—"surely you're not afraid of me?" and he tried again to turn her head.

But Denalee twisted out of his arms.

"Please, Robert. I know I'm silly, but—" She shivered.

"You're cold — that's what it is." He picked up her wrap and dropped it about her, his arm lingering on her shoulder. "Better?"

"Yes; but, Robert, I'm not feeling well. I want you to take me back to the tavern—"

"Oh, come now, Denalee, don't be absurd. This is the first moment I've had you to myself. I want to talk to you."

"Yes, yes, I know, but not to-night."

His arm went about her again, and she shuddered. "Please try to understand."

His arm fell from her shoulder and he looked at her. In the moonlight his face seemed as cold, as hard, as marble. "Perhaps I do understand," he said.

Without a word he turned and went down the steps. Silently she followed him, silently she got into the car, and silently they went down the mountain.

When at last she was in her little room again she knelt at the window, staring out into the night.

What was the matter with her?

What had possessed her to behave that way?

Had the tavern bewitched her?

Not the tavern, but— Her lips trembled in the darkness, and the hot color flooded her cheeks. Presently she sighed, got up. This was madness. She had lived Aunt Dena's romance until she had lost her sense of values. That was all very lovely for *then*, but this was *now*, 1930. She couldn't build her life on an 1830 model! She must face facts — her twenty-four years of struggle had taught her that, if nothing else. Her mother's face rose before her, white, tired. Her mother—how valiantly she had struggled for her for twenty years. Denalee's shoulders squared, at least she could carry on.

She went over to the tiny writing desk, drew a sheet of paper toward her and wrote:

DEAR ROBERT:

Please forgive me!

All that I can say is that I must have an Aunt Dena complex, and at midnight I turn into some one else! Certainly I was not myself.

I am going home to-morrow. Do come down soon, and when you do you will find—if you still want her—

Your same

DENALEE.

She sealed and addressed the envelope, then dropped her head on her arms and was very still.

WHEN she awoke next morning it was nearly midday. She climbed out of bed, dressed hurriedly, and in ten minutes was off to the post office with the letter to Robert tucked in her bag.

She hurried so, and the climb was so steep that she arrived almost out of breath. She dropped down for a minute on the steps of the store before going inside.

A Ford buzzed up, and a man leaned out—an apple buyer. "What you fellers asking?"

"Seven dollars," one of the men leaning against the door called out.

"Seven dollars! Not for me—" and he buzzed off.

"Say, Ben," another of the group spoke up, "you ain't really holdin' out for seven? First thing you know you'll be in Harry Wynne's fix."

Denalee sat up—moved nearer.

"What's the matter with Harry?"

"Bank's called him."

"What! Who's behind that—Barclay?"

"Yeah. Seems they been carrying Harry all right, and this morning Barclay breezes in, lookin' as mad as a hornet, and said his notes had to be paid—in full."

"Ain't that rotten? Harry can't pay it."

"Of course he can't. But he could if he hadn't stood by us boys. I owe him more'n his loan right now, but I can't do anything till I sell my apples."

"And Barclay knows all that."

"Sure. Well, what's Harry goin' to do?"

"What can he do? He's got his three days of grace, but he can't get any money round here. Barclay's fixed that."

"Can you beat it? And him with all the money in the world! But he set out to get Harry, and it looks like—"

An automobile horn sounded, and there came the grinding of brakes as a bus rounded the mountain — stopped. Denalee took a hasty look at the money in her bag—enough for her ticket home. With a sigh of relief she climbed in.

III

IT was nearly midnight. The living room of the old tavern was very still. Deserted, too, except for the man leaning against the mantelpiece, gazing into the dying fire.

A door opened softly—a light flickered—a white arm curved round the banisters.

Harrison stood very still, watching carefully. Quietly he moved a stool so that she would not stumble over it.

Slowly she came on, with that measured step, eyes fixed and staring. She paused at the table, set down the candle, then came straight toward him. She stopped, raised her face to his.

Very gently he kissed her.

But the lips that met his were not asleep—and two soft arms went about his neck.

"Denalee"—he held her away—"you aren't asleep!"

"No." She looked up mischievously.

Harrison glared at her, suspicion dawning in his eyes. "Were you that other time?"

"No-o—" She shook her head.

"What! Do you mean to tell me—"

"Don't explode so, Harrison. You'll have Mrs. Gardner down here in a minute."

"Well, of all things! You came down here, walked up to a strange man and deliberately—*deliberately*—" He seethed, and before he could get out another word Denalee got out a lot more.

"I did not! You make me sick, Harrison Wynne. I was hungry, if you must know, and I'd seen a bowl of fruit on the sideboard. How'd I know you were skulking in the shadow?"

"Skulking!"

"Well, then, lurking, if you like that better." She held up a hand to silence him. "And when I saw you I felt so silly I thought I'd better be Aunt Dena Lee. I had no idea you'd take advantage of that to kiss me!" She looked both dignified and hurt.

"Aw, now, Denalee — I didn't mean—you know—" he blundered on.

"We won't discuss it, please." She waved an airy hand. "Sit down, I have something to tell you."

Harrison sat.

So did Denalee. "I've been looking for you for two days. Where have you been?"

"I've been away."

"So I imagined. Might I ask where?"

"Certainly." His lips set. "I've been down to the city to sell my place."

"Oh, Harrison! You wouldn't do that — not with all that it means to you—the tradition—"

"Tradition!" The word burned with bitterness. "That's why I'm in this mess. If I hadn't stuck to that stuff I'd have come down on some of the farmers like your friend—I beg your pardon."

He got up, strode about the room. "What's the good of this, Denalee? You can see I'm sore as a bear, and my small affairs can be of no interest to you since you are going to marry Barclay."

"Who says I am?"

"Everybody. He admits it."

"Well, I'm not."

"You're not!" The light in his eyes blazed. "Why, Denalee, surely it can't be because—" He took a step toward her.

"I think it is because of something Mrs. Gardner said," the girl spoke slowly, eyes far away.

"Oh!" He took a step back. "Well, at that," he went on brusquely, "you're probably making a mistake. He at least can take care of you. See here, Denalee"—he came toward her savagely—"I've tried to keep away from you since I found out how things stood, tried to give Barclay a fair field. I love you!" He flung this at her like a blow. "But I'm a failure, flat broke. After Monday I won't even have a roof over my head."

"Did I understand you to say that you loved me?"

"You did if you're not deaf. What of it?"

"Well, would you, ah— I mean would it make any difference if you got an extension on your note, and sold your crop for seven dollars—"

"Would it make any difference if John D. Rockefeller adopted me? Don't be silly! And don't stand there looking at me like that. I'm not going to kiss you. We're both awake now."

"Oh, do try to subside, Harrison." Denalee gave him an exasperated push. "I've got something to show you."

He subsided—at least to the edge of the chair, and Denalee pulled up a stool to his side.

"Read this." She thrust a paper into his hand.

And then she looked at him. The deep, tired lines about his mouth, the old corduroy clothes, the gray flannel shirt, and the tie that no "gentleman" would wear. He turned a page and the tie fell aside. On the shirt there were three buttons where five ought to be.

She picked up his hat from the floor—the disreputable hat that he loved. A battered old thing, but with such a gallant set to the crown—she held it close, closer, and into her eyes there came tears.

"Jove! Why, this is salvation—it's life—it's *you!*" He looked up. "Why, Denalee—dearest!"

He reached over, picked her up and sat her on his knee, cradled her in his arms. "My dear, my dear, what is it?"

"It's you, Harrison," from the depths of his coat there came a sad sniffling. "You—you are such a silly old thing—and I—I love you—"

"Oh, is that all?" It was too bad she couldn't see the shine in his eyes, but some of it was in his voice. He kissed the top of her head, gave her his handkerchief. "Do you know what you've done for me, sweet? Why,

if this Brazilian buyer takes my crop for immediate shipment that will care for my loan, and "—he tilted her face upward—"how in the world did you do it?"

"I didn't. I went to the only man I know who could—my godfather. You know I told you he's president of the Valley Trust, so I told him if he loved me he just had to let me have this money. Well, he does, so he did."

"Very simple." Harrison smiled. "But how in the name of all that's lucky did he get this South American order through now?"

"He's in touch with the market, you know, and as soon as I showed him my sample—the top one, you remember?—he got on the long distance phone with the New York representative, and presto—"

The old clock struck twelve.

Denalee slipped out of his arms. She caught up a candle, ran up the stairs, then came slowly down.

Harrison tiptoed to the foot of the flight and waited.

She paused a moment at the bottom, then closed her eyes and raised her face for his kiss. But nothing happened.

Her eyes flew open.

He was in a broad grin. "Can't kiss sleep-walking ladies unless I *know* they are asleep—got into trouble that way once."

"More than you know. If it hadn't been for that first kiss—" She smiled reminiscently. "I suppose I'll just have to take up sleep-walking for a life work—"

"No. Something much worse."

"What?"

"Me." Harrison gathered her in his arms. "'A man had given all other bliss, and all his worldly worth for'"—he bent closer—"this!"

AFTERWARD

I HAVE learned to look with scornful eyes
On Love the bubble, the dream, the snare;
No more shall Love have my heart to tear—
Behold me, I am very wise!

My lesson I've learned in a bitter school;
Never again shall my sad heart wake
To hope and dream, for Love's sweet sake.
Wise am I now, who was a fool.

But where is the magic of morning skies?
Beauty is gone from the windy shore,
The lark's song thrills me nevermore—
Pity the fool, who once was wise!

—Nina Brown Baker

"Do you believe in love at first sight—too?"

Cinderella of the Ten Cent Store

By FLAVIA DAFOE

CLERKING in the Ten Cent Store was fun for Joyce Winthrop. Every morning at eight o'clock when she passed through the wide-open red doors she felt she was starting on a wonderful trip around the world.

Counters piled high with toys sent her vivid imagination to Germany. Counters of soaps and perfumes suggested France. Piles of silks, coming maybe from the silk-worm girls of China; laces from Belgium, linens from Scotland, cottons from our own American South—magic names like New Orleans, Memphis, Mobile. Hardware, from tiny screws to heavy hammers, made from steel forged in those glowing Pennsylvania furnaces about which she had so often read. Yo Yo tops spinning their way from Hawaii to capture old and young with their incredible, unbelievable antics. China and glass, reproductions of the lovely things to be found in exclusive shops. Mounds of tin manufactured by Amos Weyth, the tin plate king, who lived right here in San Francisco. Phonographs tingling feet with the jazz of Whiteman. Pianos crooning forth the wistful melodies of Irving Berlin!

And people!

A constant stream of ever-changing humanity surging up one aisle and down the other—all types, rich and poor, foreign and American, Chinese and Japanese, Greek and Jew—Joyce made up stories about many of them, stories she meant to write and to have published in the magazines which were

sold at the stationery counter. At present she was too busy earning the sixteen dollars paid her every Saturday night for outside work, but she kept eyes and ears open. She absorbed impressions and jotted down catchy phrases or humorous remarks overheard as she wrapped packages and made change from the nickel register. She was an ambitious little person. She meant to get ahead. Also she had a mission in life. It was to buy back the ranch where she had lived for eighteen years of her life and which at the death of her parents she learned was mortgaged to the hilt.

A year ago Joyce had been a carefree, irresponsible youngster, riding joyously over her father's ranch in Oregon. Atop Firefly, the wild, swift stallion she had gentled herself, she idled away many a happy hour on the range. Her lithe body grew strong as a sapling; her spirit fearless and daring. She was content, happy, asking of life nothing more than a continuation of her healthy young existence.

Then in the twinkling of an eye everything changed.

Her father and mother met with a fatal accident. The great ranch was found to be heavy with debt. There was no money for her, no home, no relations even, save a few cousins in another State, from whom she shrank from accepting charity.

Equipped with nothing but a meager wardrobe and a few dollars salvaged from the sale of household effects, she betook herself to the city about which she had heard so much—San Francisco.

So here she was at the Ten Cent Store. Counter 16 had been assigned her, the fishing supplies. Joyce liked it at once. She liked selling trout lines to middle-aged men, and gay bobbers to red-cheeked youngsters. She liked seeing overalled laborers hand over their dimes for tackle which meant relaxation and fun from their daily grind.

Her sunny disposition and contagious smile won her friends among employees and patrons alike. Nothing was ever too much trouble; she was never too tired to "help out" if help were needed. When the store conducted a contest for the most efficient and the most popular clerk, she won by a wide margin. It carried no monetary bonus, the prize being an afternoon a week off for one month—with pay. Joyce was jubilant and grateful.

This Wednesday marked her first holiday. She had known for days how it was to be spent. She was going to hire a horse and go up into those little hills which form a picturesque background for skyscraper and bridge.

One o'clock found her at her boarding house, donning riding togs and inveigling her landlady into putting up a picnic lunch. A few minutes later she was on a horse and picking her way along a bridle path which led out from the city, around steep rises and through miniature ravines to where a ridge thrust its summit above the tumbled land.

By a silver spring set coolly in the darkening shade of giant pines, she ate her repast, doing full justice to the proverbial ham sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs and dill pickles which every picnicker chooses for an outdoor feast.

It was very quiet here in the sylvan dell. The sun came in tiny shafts through the interstices overhead. squirrels flirted audaciously with pine-wood sparrows. Near a thicket which ran parallel to bridlepath and motor road, effectively separating the two, a

portly hedgehog backed down a scrub cedar and lumbered into the underbrush with quills rustling. With a sigh of unutterable content, Joyce curled up on a carpet of fragrant needles, closed her eyes and forgot for three hours or more the workaday world with its problems of food and roof.

IT was five o'clock when she was roused by the sound of men's voices which seemed to be coming from the other side of the thicket screening her camping place. Not yet thoroughly awake, she stretched luxuriously, opened her eyes, closed them, then yawned, patting her lips with the tips of slim fingers. Her mouth remained half open, her hand poised in mid-air, as the meaning of the conversation penetrated her consciousness.

What a situation! The men on the other side of the cedars were crooks!

"I've framed him to a finish." She lay breathless, intent on hearing every word. "Made it look as though Westfall's responsible for the business leak, when it's Weyth's own kid that's spilled the beans. The kid's in Europe, so we're safe there. Old man Weyth's tearing mad. He's canned Westfall and sworn to prevent his getting any other job in this burg. All you have to do is, be on hand early Friday morning. The old man will hire you like a shot."

"Sounds easy," another voice answered while Joyce strained her ears to miss nothing. "But Westfall has worked faster than we have. He's signed up with Dick Preston, the writer, to do special work for him. They're leaving for Hawaii to-night in Preston's yacht."

"Cripes! That's got to be nipped in the bud! Preston and Weyth are cronies and if Westfall gets Preston to intercede for him, we're goners. Wait, I've got it! We'll slip the news to the old man by telephone, and if I know Weyth, he'll go charging out to the boat to-night and expose Westfall. He's a vindictive old cuss. I wouldn't want him on my trail."

"Lord, no!" The other voice was fervent. "You're a great little fixer, I'll say that for you. With me as the old man's secretary, everything will be clear sailing. What about Ann?"

"You'll have to do your own scouting there. I'm no lady's gent. If she sticks to Westfall, the jig's up. I've framed him with the old man; you ought to be able to handle the girl. What do you want her for, anyway? You ain't in her class."

"That's my business. I want her and I'm going to get her. Come on, let's move. It's time we drifted back to town. Besides, Ann is up there in that tea house with a crowd, and I'm taking no chances of her seeing me just now. You'll handle the telephone business then? O. K. Gosh, how pretty we'll be setting in a day or two."

A few seconds passed, perhaps ten, perhaps thirty, perhaps more. To Joyce it seemed time interminable as she crouched behind the thicket, listening to the whir of a motor, the shifting of gears, the sound of a car rolling smoothly down the road which connected with the bridle path farther on. Then she straightened, discovering that her fists were tightly clenched and that her heart was turning cartwheels in excitement.

What could she do to prevent the culmination of this frame-up? Amos Weyth, the tin plate king, was too public a character not to have been in the newspapers. She had seen pictures of himself, his daughter Ann, his son Stanley, and the Weyth home, a mag-

nificent estate, sloping down to the bay. But who was Dick Preston? A writer, the crooks said. She had never heard of him. And Westfall—the discharged secretary who evidently loved Ann—where could she find him?

And if she did go to any of them would they believe this wild tale of a Ten Cent Store girl? She had no proof to substantiate the story. She could not identify the two plotters. No, the only thing to do was to prevent Weyth from seeing Preston.

But how?

KNEES drawn up and clasped in her arms, Joyce gazed at an ancient pine which twisted out of an overhanging rock in the most approved Japanese print fashion. But her mind was not on the scenery. Plan after plan leaped into being only to be rejected as theatrical or unsound. Whatever she did must be accomplished without the principals discovering her identity. They might want to reward her, and her pride shrank from such a possibility. If only she could do something to Preston's yacht! Ah—an idea sprang into being; expanded—became a full-fledged scheme. She had it at last—the perfect plan!

Now as to details.

Mind alert and busy, she became aware suddenly of an intruding noise from above, a curious clatter, as if a horse were running pellmell down the stony incline. But that would be impossible, for no rider would take the trail at anything but a walk. Below her, just a short distance, the path swerved in a sharp turn to meet the road that ran perilously near the edge of a precipice. If some miracle guided a running horse safely around the bend, nothing could save him from plunging headlong to the rocks beneath.

Joyce took her stand in the narrow trail and strained her eyes for the first glimpse of that which was creating such a queer panic in her heart. She had only a moment to wait. Down the incline they came—a magnificent roan tearing along like the wind and a man clinging to the saddle horn, helpless with a broken bridle rein.

Joyce heard herself scream once; then a great calm came upon her, steadying nerve and eye. There was only one chance in a million to check that speed, but she would try it.

Stepping back to the little hummock on the side, she waited, body taut as a stretched wire. Horse and man were near enough now for her to see the flaming nostrils of the one, the white, set face of the other. But, oh, thank God, the man had somehow succeeded in getting hold of the one good rein and was tugging and pulling with every ounce of his virile strength. On they came, nearer and nearer, a rod—a yard—a foot—opposite! Like a dart shot from the bow of a skilled marksman Joyce leaped, caught the dangling strap and hung on, teeth clenched, lips moving in wordless prayer.

Inch by inch the bit was forced back into the animal's sensitive mouth. Little by little the combined sawing of the two lessened the terrific speed. The man's right arm uncurled from the pommel and fastened itself around the girl. Whatever happened he must hold her high enough to escape those steel-shod, flying feet. On they tore. Man, woman and beast were rapidly becoming exhausted, when with quivering nostrils and foam-flecked sides, the roan settled back on his haunches, panting, on the chasm's very brink.

The man swung himself from the saddle and steadied the girl with an arm around the shaking shoulders.

"Thanks don't mean much in a case like this," he said, "but I'm saying them just the same. Won't you tell me your name, please? Mine is Westfall. Don Westfall."

"Not the Westfall who was secretary to Amos Weyth?" Joyce brushed her hand across her forehead, bewildered. "Not the Westfall who is engaged to his daughter Ann? Quick, answer me!" She gave his arm a little shake. "Are you that Don Westfall?"

The man straightened as though throwing off a spell. There were two creases about his clean mouth; the hazel eyes which regarded her were candid and keen. The charm of his smile brought a responsive gleam to the girl's lips.

"Yes to both of your questions," he said, "though I don't see how in the dickens you know all this. I'm going to be unpardonably rude and confess I can't remember ever having seen you before. Have I?"

"Not unless you've bought fishing supplies at the Ten Cent Store." Joyce colored richly as she met his quizzical look. "I never heard of you, either, until a few minutes ago. But listen, Mr. Westfall, and I'll tell you the whole story."

"THE blackguards!" Westfall's hands were clenched when Joyce ended the plot she had heard behind the pine wood thicket. The veins on his temples stood out like whipcords. "They've framed me to a finish and no mistake. As conditions now stand, I'm helpless to clear myself, even with your story. Mr. Weyth is a man of ungovernable temper, and this business leak has flicked him in the raw, besides costing him a cool twenty thousand dollars. He thinks I'm responsible and in his present mood will listen to no explanation. If his son Stanley is to blame, he is unwittingly so, he's as straight as a die. My hands are tied there, too, for he left Switzerland last week and I have no idea of his new address.

"Ann is my one hope and I've been unable to talk with her. She's up at the inn now, but though I've hung around all afternoon, her aunt has seen to it that I haven't come within shouting distance.

"Dick Preston is a close friend of the Weyth's. Even if I told him of the frame-up he'd prefer to take Mr. Weyth's version rather than mine. I hoped to approach the subject gradually and perhaps later on, ask him to intercede, but now, the jig's up. When Mr. Weyth tells Preston his angle of the affair I'll be hunting another job."

"Mr. Weyth will not see Mr. Preston." Joyce's cheeks blazed with excitement; her blue eyes looked like shining sapphires. "I have a plan, but I'd rather not take time to explain it. Where is Mr. Preston's yacht anchored, Mr. Westfall, and what is its name?"

"The Shadow. It lies in direct line with the clubhouse, about half a mile out from the beach. Preston just arrived from the East last night and has been up to his ears in work, else he probably would have seen Mr. Weyth. I chanced to be at the Authors Club when he blew in and overheard him inquiring about a secretary. 'Nuf sed. I landed the job. You're a trump to help me like this. Some day, if I live long enough, I'll repay you. So will Ann—I hope."

"Of course she will." Something wistful in the hazel eyes looking into hers made Joyce's voice very gentle. "You'll have to go back to the inn to repair this bridle. Why not make an-

other attempt to outwit the ogre aunt? Perhaps—who knows?—you may be able to persuade Ann to marry you at once and to spend your honeymoon on board The Shadow. With the daughter

As they arrayed themselves she wondered—was this other girl her rival?

your wife does look as though the fire-eating Mr. Weyth would have to listen to reason."

"Thanks for the tip." The sudden set of Westfall's jaw meant that he was quite prepared to turn himself into a matrimonial pirate, and if the worse came to the worst, to carry off his lady willy-nilly. "You're sure it is quite all right for you to ride back to town alone? It's after six, you know. The traffic will be heavy."

"I can manage," Joyce smiled secretly. She who had ridden wild stallions not to be able to handle a stable horse! "Don't worry, Mr. Westfall, if I fail in my plan, you'll be no worse off, and something tells me I'll not fail. Good luck and good-by. The next couple of hours promises to be exciting, don't they? I feel like the leading lady in a movie."

"I'm not sure which part I'm cast for." Westfall watched the slender figure swing into the saddle and settle there with the soft motion of the true rider. "I want to be the hero, but from the murderous thoughts inside me I may turn out to be the villain. If I can persuade Ann to be Mrs. to my Mr. you may find yourself in the rôle of bridesmaid. Holy cats! I'm forgetting I don't know your name nor where you live—"

"Miss Weyth will doubtless prefer one of her friends to attend her." Joyce remembered suddenly that she was far removed from the station of these people whom she planned to help. A Ten Cent Store clerk aspiring to be leading lady! Things didn't happen so in real life. "My name is Joyce Winthrop, and if you need me come to counter sixteen at the Nickel and Dime. Now I must go, so good luck again. Better get to the inn as soon as possible.

"Right-o! I'm a world beater for speed." He smiled and held out his hand and hers came to meet it, tightening in a clasp whose warmth was prophetic. "Take care of yourself and don't run any risks. I'd feel easier in my mind if I knew your plan, but if you prefer secrecy, I'm bound to respect your wishes. So long, Miss Joyce Winthrop. I'd just like to say, if you'll let me, that you're a thoroughbred."

He watched the boyish figure atop the rangy bay pick her way carefully down the stony incline. She rode like an Indian, loosely, swaying, her right arm swinging with the rhythm. Who was she, really, this slim girl with the attractive face and the dark hair which seemed to have bronzy lights burned into it? Did she actually clerk at the Ten Cent Store or was she spoofing him?

Puzzled but nevertheless whistling gayly, Westfall slipped the bridle rein through his arm and started up the path to the inn, his air that of a conquering hero about to remove all obstacles in his path. With such a spirit any lover can win. It is not surprising that when he rode down the hill again, Ann Weyth rode with him.

IT was dark along the water's edge as Joyce, with her heart in her mouth, sought some means of getting out to The Shadow, which lay apart from the other boats, directly, as Westfall had said, in straight line with the clubhouse. Only canoes were drawn up on the beach, and Joyce had no more idea how to paddle a canoe than she had to run an airship. But she did possess a strong determination backed by a fund of common sense, so without hesitation she chose a dark-colored one, seated herself squarely in the middle, took up a paddle and pushed off. It was horribly tippy at first and her strokes sent the light craft careening and wobbling with all the antics of a drunken sailor. Gradually, however, the rhythm of the strokes came to her. She experimented with the paddle until she learned how deep to dip. In a fairly direct course she reached the yacht on which by the light of another, she read the name, "Shadow" and knew it to be the one she sought.

After circling and circling until she was close to the bow, she dropped the paddle, grasped the mooring line and with a knife purchased for that express deed, commenced to hack furiously. It was precarious work. The canoe seemed alarmingly insecure. She had to stop frequently to assure herself no one was in sight, and the rope was unnecessarily thick. She sawed on vigorously, pantingly. The rope parted with

unexpected suddenness; the canoe shot out from under her, drifting beyond reach, and Joyce found herself precipitated into the water, one hand still grasping the dangling piece of rope.

"And I can't even swim!" she thought despairingly. "What on earth am I going to do?"

Obviously there was only one thing left for her to do, so she did it.

Hand over hand, she drew herself up the side of the boat. Dripping and shivering, for San Francisco nights are not warm even in July, and the water possessed a decided chill, she stood in the bow, waiting for she knew not what to happen. A pretty mess she had made of things, but oh, joy, the yacht was commencing to move! At any rate, that much of her plan was accomplished. Amos Weyth would not find The Shadow at its mooring place when he rowed out to interview Richard Preston. She only hoped the boat would drift a mile or so before her deed was discovered.

But her hope was short-lived. Pell-mell up the companionway came a young man in yachting costume. Such a handsome chap! Joyce quite approved of the tall, well-knit figure, the clear gray eyes, and the dark hair which repeated brushings could not make lie smooth. He halted amazed at the sight of her; his glance traveling from her riding boots over the tops of which water dripped dismally, to the mop of black hair already beginning to curl around her face in tight little ringlets. Obviously he was a much bewildered young man.

"I think," Joyce's voice was very small; she felt like a naughty urchin caught in a raid on the cooky jar—"I think if you please, I'd like to see Mr. Preston."

"You are seeing him now." The young man's voice was pleasant. He came nearer, and the light shining from the lantern overhead threw into bold relief the clear-cut features and the quizzical gray eyes. "I am Richard Preston. What may I do for you, Miss Mermaid?"

"But you *can't* be—not Richard Preston, the writer!" Joyce's dismay brought a smile to her listener's lips. "Why, that Mr. Preston is *old!*"

"What makes you think he's old?"

"Because he's a friend of Amos Weyth's, and Mr. Weyth must be sixty-five or more. Oh, dear, what a muddle I've made of everything!"

"Well, don't cry, for Lord's sake." His expression out-Hamleted Hamlet. "I'm the Richard Preston who writes and I am also a friend of Amos Weyth's. Suppose you tell me the whole story—I can see there is one. Begin, won't you, please?"

So Joyce told him. It hadn't been in her plan, this interview with the owner of the yacht. She had thought simply to cut the boat adrift and vanish. But now as long as matters were so complicated, she might as well make a clean breast of it and rely upon this man's sense of fair play.

"Jove, what an up-mix!" he said when she finished. "I can well understand Westfall's position—Amos is a tartar when that temper of his gets started. But I can help a bit toward putting matters straight. I know where Stanley Weyth is, so I'll wireless him, and his answer will clear Westfall. But I advise a waiting game. Let things take the course these crooks planned, and we'll catch 'em red-handed.

"What bothers me just now is our own predicament. All the crew are ashore, and they plan to bring back a piece of machinery that's in the repair shop. I don't know how to make an-

chorage without engine power, and the engine won't work without this particular piece. Thank the Lord, we're drifting away from the other boats, so there's no danger of a ram.

"You'd better go below and get into dry togs, first of all. You're shivering to beat three of a kind. Touch a match to the rubbish in the air-tight and get warm. I'll rummage around for a sailor suit that won't be too large for you and leave it outside the door. As soon as you are ready, come back on deck and we'll discuss how to get to shore. Don't worry. I think the whole thing no end of a lark!"

Something in his ardent voice caused Joyce to color richly. She went down to the snug cabin, lighted the fire, then proceeded to pull off her dripping habit and spread it over a chair within the heat's radius. She stuffed her boots with paper and hung her stockings over the nickel top of the stove. Then in her undies she crouched over the fire and commenced fluffing out her wet hair. In an unbelievably short time she was dry and warm to the marrow. Preston had already left the suit outside her door, so she donned it, doubling and redoubling the tops of the too-long trousers and doing the same to the sleeves. As she was padding the soles and toes of the canvas shoes with paper, she heard the zip and crash of the wireless, starting its inquiry on the way to Stanley Weyth in Holland.

SHE was a pretty sight when she came on deck. At least, Richard Preston thought so. Her cheeks were deeply flushed, her eyes brilliant with excitement. Her heart shook her with its pounding as she saw the flame of admiration which leaped into those candid gray eyes.

Oh, what sort of a fairyland was this in which she was living! The deck with its divan and tempting chairs of gayly cushioned wicker presented the last word in sea-going luxury. Brass and nickel gleamed in undimmed splendor. The ship's clock musically chimed the hour. And best of all was a fairy-tale prince in white flannels and a blue coat saying things with his eyes which for the moment his laughing lips withheld. This couldn't be happening to her—to Joyce Winthrop, clerk in the Ten Cent Store! It couldn't be. But, miracle of miracles, it was!

"Let's figure out a way to get to shore." Preston drew up a deep-cushioned chair into which the girl sank with a sigh of luxuriousness. "I can't let this boat drift about alone and in deep water the anchor won't hold. By jove!" He leaned forward, straining his eyes to see over the rail. "I believe we're in the path of an eddy which is taking us nearer the beach. We are—by all that's holy! Isn't that luck? We'll anchor, launch the row-boat and proceed to track down Ann and Westfall. If you're going to be bridesmaid at their wedding, I reckon I'll put in a claim now to be best man. Hello!" His voice changed. Joyce saw that his eyes were intent upon a blotch in the pale moon-path. "What's that launch kicking up such a froth for? Take those binoculars on the table, and watch her while I make anchor, will you, Miss Winthrop? She sure is stepping pretty."

Left alone, Joyce watched the approaching boat. For some unaccountable reason her hands shook as she tried to adjust the focus. Could they be following The Shadow? They were cutting along at a tremendous rate. Spray flew at the bow. The nose was high from the water. She braced her elbows on the rail and strove to

steady the glasses. Better. She saw plainly now. The launch was bearing down upon them. In it were figures; two figures, which sent her pellmell to the other side where Preston was.

"The boat is after us," she whispered, her teeth chattering with excitement and fear. "There are policemen in it. What—what do you suppose they want?"

"Haven't the slightest idea." Preston dropped the anchor, then straightened. His voice was cool, his eyes inscrutable, but the girl saw that his hands were tightly clenched. "You mustn't be found here in male attire, Joyce. Go to the far end and busy yourself with coiling ropes. I'll try to stave them off."

"Boat ahoy!"

The launch drew alongside The Shadow and both officers secured their painter, then climbed on board.

"Seen anything of a woman in a canoe?" the leader asked. "Ann Weyth's elopin' with a young blackguard named Westfall and old man Weyth's offering a thousand dollars for her return. A dame answering her description was seen pullin' off in a canoe about an hour ago, and we've orders to search all the yachts in the harbor. Reckon you got no objections to our goin' over this boat, young feller? What are you doin' way off down here anyhow? Looks suspicious."

"Nonsense, officer." Preston's voice was friendly. "My mooring line parted company, and I've been drifting around, unable to make anchor. Go ahead and search all you want to. I don't blame you for being keen on picking up a thousand berries.

As the officers disappeared down the companionway, Preston was in their launch with a bound, motioning Joyce to follow. He undid the painter, threw on the self-starter, put the engine in reverse and gripped the wheel. As the boat came about, he advanced the switch to full speed ahead and the powerful launch cut away from The Shadow, just as two outraged policemen reappeared on deck and shook futile fists at their fast disappearing backs.

"We'll land at one of the docks along here," Preston shouted to Joyce who crouched on the cushion along the side. "It wouldn't have done for us to remain on the yacht. When those pinheads found your clothes in the cabin, they'd have jumped to the conclusion you were Ann. Lord, what a scandal! Of course they'll follow us in the rowboat, but we've a good start and we'll manage to elude them somehow. Aren't frightened, are you, Joyce?"

"Not—with you."

Against all volition the words spoke themselves. For a fleeting moment the girl looked up; the man looked down, but that moment seemed the length of weeks. Both knew—and recognized the fact. Preston leaned over and laid his hand lightly on her shoulder. Youth and ardor were in his face and his look sent the blood flaming in Joyce's veins.

"Just to be sure—it is really so, darling." His rich voice caressed her. "Do you know what I said to myself as you stood shivering in the bow? I said, 'I've found her! I've found my girl!' Thank God, you believe in love at first sight, too. Oh, Joyce, you dear! you dear!" Then he released her and caught the wheel.

THROUGH the water they tore, sending up a cloud of spray which, Joyce thought hysterically, was almost as effective as a smoke screen. A temperamental moon

played hide-and-seek among swift-moving clouds, outlining the shore with startling vividness one minute, shrouding it in deepest gloom the next. During one of the intermittent flashes of light, Preston picked out a dock, headed for it, and shut off the motor. It seemed only an instant before the painter was made fast, they were out of the launch and running rapidly along a lane which led through tall trees to where a drive spread circularwise around a pretentious house.

"Good Lord, we're in the Weyth grounds!" Preston muttered, as familiar landmarks obtruded themselves upon his vision. "Of all the fool stunts! And listen, aren't those footsteps? Sounds like some one running. Let's play safe and wait behind this hedge until we see who it is."

He drew her within the shelter of giant geraniums, his arm going about her, holding her close. Did he press his lips against her hair? Joyce could not be sure. She only knew that happiness flooded her being; peace filled her heart. What if those silly policemen did catch her—take her before Amos Weyth? She had done no harm. Somehow everything would come right because Richard Preston was with her; protecting her; loving her.

"By the Lord Harry, it's Ann and Westfall!"

She was drawn into the path again and Richard was pumping the hand of a man and patting the shoulder of a slender girl wrapped in a voluminous dark cloak with a scarf wound closely about her face. There were explanations but no need of introductions. Ann hugged the figure in sailor costume, whispering over and over again her gratitude to Joyce for having saved her lover's life.

"We're going to be friends," she said, as the two men discussed what was best to be done. "We *are* friends already. Joyce, will you come with me to Hawaii? Don will have his work and Richard expects to complete a book on the trip, and I don't want to be lonely. Do say yes. You can play at being my secretary-companion."

"Do you really—want me?"

"More than I can tell."

"Then I will. But oh, Ann, I haven't any clothes. I haven't any money. I don't know a lot of things you may wish I did. Perhaps you won't like teaching me to be—a lady."

"You are that now. As for clothes and money—piffle! You'll earn the one and I have loads of pretties for us both." She caught both of Joyce's hands and drew her forward. "Don—Rich—meet my new companion. She is going with us to Honolulu."

"G r e a t!" Westfall's voice was hearty. Preston said nothing. He drew Joyce's hand within his arm and started up the path.

"We've decided to force your father to hear the whole story, dearest," Westfall explained as they followed. Preston wirelessed Stan and there's just a chance an answer may come back to-night. With the police on our trail, we won't be able to be married or to leave until this mess is cleared up. If only Amos will listen to the facts! I'm afraid I haven't bettered my case by kidnaping you, but you're so sweet, Ann. I just couldn't go off and leave you behind."

"I never would have forgiven you if you had." Ann laughed, but there was a tender note in her voice that made the man suddenly catch her in his arms and kiss her. "But Don, I've lost my secretary-companion. Joyce is going to become Mrs. Richard Preston as soon as Dick finds a clergyman."

"I wager you're right." Hazel eyes surveyed the two in front. "A double wedding, Ann, with a honeymoon on board The Shadow! Can you believe it? If your father will only prove amenable, we'll all have clear sailing."

They were now at the house, and Charles, the impassive butler, conducted the four into the library where a stoutish man was running frenzied fingers through his white hair until it stood upright in little tufts. On the table, fluttering with the vibration of his heavy footsteps, was a radiogram containing information which had left him as devoid of anger as a flat tire is devoid of air.

He was chagrined and puzzled and ashamed.

Chagrined at being in the wrong. Ashamed of his treatment of young Westfall. Puzzled as to his son's knowledge of the whole affair.

To cap the climax, in a violent burst of temper, he had set the police on Ann's trail. Good Lord, what a sorry spectacle he had made of himself. His unreasonable anger had already cost him a daughter, a secretary and a son-in-law, to say nothing of the twenty thousand, which in the light of the greater losses seemed scarcely worth considering.

Well, the fat was in the fire. All that he could do now was to call off the minions of the law, find Ann and Westfall and make overtures for pardon. He had learned his lesson, or had he? Honesty compelled him to acknowledge that sixty-five is rather late to curtail a long-undisciplined temper. He suddenly felt old and tired and lonely.

The door opened. Four people came into the room. Before he realized what was happening, Ann was in his arms, laughing and pouring out explanations so incoherent that the two men had to be called on to make things clear. The radiogram was exhibited, forgotten. Westfall was reëngaged, and given an indefinite leave of absence for the honeymoon. Congratulations were tendered Joyce and Richard. It was all confusing and exhilarating and heart-warming, but in the midst of it, Amos Weyth was conscious of a vague tug at the memory; a sense of familiarity when he looked into the happy face of this strange girl to whom they were so deeply indebted. Where had he seen that broad forehead, those grave, candid eyes? Ah! Remembrance flashed its message. He spoke.

"When I was a boy back East," he said, addressing Joyce, "I had a friend. Bob Winthrop his name was. A pal. Might he by any chance be a relation of yours?"

"He was my father." Joyce smiled through a mist; her loss was too recent to speak of without tears. "He and my mother were killed in an accident about a year ago. And you knew him, Mr. Weyth? How wonderful!"

"He gave me my stake to come West." Something in his voice caused the girl's heart to pound like an engine. "Five hundred dollars it was, a huge sum in our eyes, for money was scarce in that locality. I was to pay it back when I could. Bob and I weren't very businesslike. We trusted each other. But I had hard luck out here. Couldn't seem to get started. When success did come, all trace of Bob was lost. I never located him. But that five hundred dollars has been invested and reinvested for him. It's fifty thousand now and ready to be handed over to his daughter. Why, Joyce, my dear, what is it?" For she had dropped to her knees beside his chair and was sobbing brokenly. "Little girls don't usually

cry when they find themselves heiresses. Come, come, this will never do."

"It's just because I am so happy." Joyce looked up through a mist of tears. "Now I can buy back our ranch, or at least make the first payment on it. Why, everything that has happened tonight is just like a story book come true. I can't believe it."

"Let's go to my room and get into pretty clothes." Fluffy-haired Ann was as practical as she was sentimental. "Then we'll join you in the dining room and have some sort of a chafing-dish supper. I'm so hungry I could eat nails. Heavens, here come the policemen!" as a terrific peal of the doorbell was heard. "Settle them, dad! It's your own funeral, you know."

In Ann's luxurious suite the two girls tubbed and powdered and arrayed themselves in purple and fine linen. Joyce had never dreamed of such garments. Sheer, lacy undies, cobwebby hose, chiffons that cost a mint and lasted a minute. A gown all petaled like a rose. She did not know herself when she looked into the glass. Small wonder that Richard Preston gasped when he saw her and had to make sure, by taking her in his arms, that she was the same girl, to whom in riding breeches and sailor suit, he had lost his heart, there on the deck of The Shadow.

"Ann and Westfall are going to be married to-morrow," he said, as hand under chin, he tilted her head back against his shoulder that he might see her eyes. "I want a wife, too. Please, sweetheart. Can't we make it a double wedding?"

"If you are sure—you want me?"

"Want you!" He smothered the word upon her lips. "A few skeptical folks may sniff at our Arabian Nights romance, but it's true, isn't it, darling, even to the fairyland ending of 'And they lived happily ever afterward'? I'm such a prosaic sort of a fellow, Joyce. I can't believe yet that you really love me. Tell me why you do."

A soft light shone in Joyce's blue eyes. A faint color stole to the edge of curly hair. She hesitated, as if wanting to prolong the sweetness of the moment. Then she reached up and kissed him on the lips.

"The best reason in the world," she whispered. "Just—because."

WEDDING VOWS

STRANGE to measure loving—
"Till death us do part!"
To estimate affection
In beatings of a heart.

As if love were candle
For careless time to snuff,
When Eternity for loving
Is not long enough.

—*Ethel Romig Fuller*

Planets of Destiny

By CAROL YOUNG

BY the application of the scientific principles of astrology your questions will be answered in these pages. But the publishers of this magazine, and also the conductor of this department, do not hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the replies, inasmuch as many readers furnish incorrect birth data and others do not know the hour of their birth. This department is conducted only for such help or interest as readers may obtain from it.

One question is allowed each reader. Question must be accompanied by coupon to be found at the back of the book. Please do not ask questions concerning death, speculation or the whereabouts of lost property.

It is very important that you give the following data: time of birth (hour of the day or night), date, month, year and place. Also sex.

No personal questions will be answered by direct mail, but if you will send ten cents in stamps to cover cost of mailing, All-Story will be glad to return to you a short estimate of your character and of the future influences for those in your Zodiacal sign, giving suggestions for at least the next two years.

DAILY ASTROLOGICAL GUIDE

For the Next Two Weeks

November 1—Not a good day, particularly if you are one whose habit it is to act or speak first and then try to justify yourself later; better think first.

November 2—This can be made a good day for the person who will be sincere and full of the spirit of service to others; but start nothing new.

November 3—If you are a woman, or one who has dealings with the fair sex, take it easy today; make no extensive or expensive alterations in plans.

November 4—A poor day all the way through; guard the bank roll in the morning and the passions during the balance; the soft answer comes in handy.

November 5—Better in the morning and early afternoon than during the remainder of the day and evening; guard against displays of temper, and danger.

November 6—Continuing generally negative, especially with those above you in the social and business worlds; slightly better in the evening.

November 7—Another day for which I cannot promise much; go slow; take your time and think everything out carefully before jumping to conclusions.

November 8—Beginning of better conditions for awhile, thank goodness! Now we can start to put into concrete form some of our better ideas.

November 9—Here is a test for you to-day: see whether you are following judgment or emotions. If all goes well, you are using your head.

November 10—Be deliberate in the morning and early afternoon; then step on the gas a bit later, if you want to; looks good for money matters.

November 11—A good day for most people; take care of your business and occupational affairs

during office hours and then have a good time socially.

November 12—Rather dangerous and unreliable in the morning and early afternoon; but stronger and safer for new ventures during the balance of day.

November 13—There is liability of faulty direction of the mental abilities to-day, so be more than usually careful in all decisions.

November 14—A favorable day, so make it count in definite action and execution of well laid plans; avoid following the feelings in the evenings.

YOUTH

If some one were to bang on my door, waking me out of a sound slumber, and ask, "What is the most critical period of a person's life?" I would probably answer without hesitation:

"Youth!"

I am more or less familiar with the fact that each of us goes through a set of life's problems every seven years we are here on this old earth; and that while we are going through one of these definite steps of our development it (the period we are in) seems more important than anything else could possibly be. When we are babies, from birth to the end of our seventh year, we are so occupied with the problems of that period that we cannot be annoyed with the silly goings-on of our elders. When we are in the next stage, from the beginning of our eighth to the end of our fourteenth year, our business is the accumulation of rudimentary education.

Then comes the period of youth from fifteen to twenty-one, inclusive, and it is the great transition period in which we are planting, developing and making permanent the emotional equipment with which we will probably go through the remainder of our lives here on this planet.

I have personally gone through this period—long enough ago to be able to view it in the proper perspective, I think, for I have also seen the problems of four more periods since completing the third one. I have children who are in the period of youth now, and everything I can remember of my own development at that time, together with my observations on theirs at this time, leads me to the conclusion that youth is the key to all life and accomplishment. That is a strong statement, but I am prepared to back it up. I have much more than these personal observations, too; for I read the letters of thousands of readers who send me their inside stories. All these confirm this strong statement I have just made.

Youth is the most important and critical period of life.

If you are in this wonderful emotional part of your existence, live it to the full and get all you can out of it, but remember a few things while doing so. Remember these:

Don't try to taste of the experiences that are properly reserved for other later periods of life. For instance, it is not according to the laws of nature for a youth to marry. He or she is not ready for the responsibilities of parenthood. He or she cannot produce even the best physical bodies for incoming souls to use before the third period has been completed, to say nothing of being able to attract the best souls of the Universe to this planet to use the body thus prepared. Look at the terrible and pathetic state of ignorance and physical weakness of India with its child marriages and you will see the point.

Youth is the budding of the flower—not the bloom. Don't pick it too early in the game or it will wither and die prematurely. The full, well rounded and beautiful flower of the emotions is one that matures slowly, but when it has been given the proper nourishment and the right kind of attention it lives forever. The emotions are being born during this critical period and are always tender, even when apparently very robust, during the third seven years of life. A disappointment or a misstep at this time will color the remainder of the life and often makes necessary long years of adjustment that would not have had to be endured if everything had been rightly directed during youth.

Ask your elders about this. As they look back they can see where a faulty decision or an emotional act before they were twenty-one years old came up and had to be adjusted with considerable pain and paying in the thirties and forties.

Above all else, don't take your feelings seriously at this stage of your development.

Don't allow yourself to believe that you are in love with a deep and everlasting emotion that will carry through the years to the end of your days. Those are merely the first faint stirrings of the great giant that is within you; you merely think it is the real thing because it is the closest you have come to it so far. You will be capable of greater feelings when you are older, if you don't pull up the plant by the roots now. These are laws that you cannot break without taking the consequences. I know you don't want to listen to this kind of talk, for the first sensations of youth are delicious in their flaming heights and bottomless depths. Yet I tell you the truth as I see it. I am your friend. And I see for you much greater joy of living and a greater total success in this life if you will wait.

It took me eleven years to straighten out the tangle that arose from just one of my early enthusiasms. If I had just slept through one day, back there before I was twenty-one, if I hadn't made that mistake, eleven years of my life would have been freer and happier. It doesn't look like a very good balance, does it, to sacrifice

eleven years of the future to the mad excitement and doubtful pleasures of one day?

This may sound to you like a sermon from an old and decrepit spoil-sport, but it isn't. It is just a business talk. I am telling you what is good business. Live your life according to natural law and it will pay bigger dividends. I'm not trying to ruin your good times. Far from it. I'm trying to show you the way to have more of them in the long run.

MATRIMONY SERVICE

Here is an example of the foregoing: you will notice that never have I recommended that any one make a definite decision on the important matter of marriage before attaining the complete age of twenty-one years. This is a matter upon which students of occultism and astrology have always agreed. In the history of the race we have had some exalted sinners who have intentionally taught untruths in order to keep their own positions of power over others, and the child marriages of India, as well as some of our other man-made laws on marriage, are instances of it.

In the following suggestions you are not to take it that I am recommending that you get married at the time mentioned. The time I give you, regardless of the exact wording of your inquiry, is the next time at which your mind and heart will be working together well enough to make a correct decision on marriage, *whether you decide at that time to do so or not to do so.* And I am giving you the benefit of the next time, regardless of how strongly you may want to marry at an earlier date.

E. M. P., December 30, 1886—September, 1932.
K. H., April 19, 1863—November, 1936. Yes, this is related to your question, although you didn't expect your answer in this section.
G. C., October 22, 1899—December, 1938.
P. H., March 6, 1913—March, 1939.
Mrs. J. W., January 7, 1888—October, 1932.
R. A., November 9, 1912—December, 1934.
S. W., January 16, 1914—April, 1937.
I. O'L. B., January 9, 1892—November, 1932.
M. S., December 1, 1899—August, 1931.
C. F. A., October 24, 1913—May, 1938.
M. P. S., March 31, 1907—September, 1931.
Mrs. J. B., June 6, 1879—February, 1938.
J. J. H., September 24, 1901—September, 1933.
H. W., April 5, 1895—January, 1936.
A. S., March 27, 1904—August, 1931.
E. K. B., October 25, 1896—October, 1934.
B. M. R., March 18, 1900—June, 1931.
B. L., August 29, 1900—September, 1932.
E. M., January 25, 1911—October, 1933.
S. G., August 25, 1911—December, 1936.
H. E. D., October 18, 1910—April, 1938.
G. E., May 13, 1902—December, 1932.
E. J., March 24, 1913—November, 1935.
M. Du F., July 1, 1909—November, 1934.
A. E. G., August 12, 1907—February, 1936.
C. A. C., November 19, 1896—June, 1931.
Mrs. C. S., April 15, 1875—November, 1936.
I. B., July 28, 1909—August, 1931.

THIS COUPON MUST ACCOMPANY EACH QUESTION ASKED

CAROL YOUNG
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This coupon is not good after Nov. 15. One question is allowed each reader.

Date of Birth..... ....., ... Time.....
MONTH DATE YEAR A.M. OR P.M.

Place..... Sex.....
MALE OR FEMALE

QUESTION:

.....

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Name.....

Street and No.....

City..... State.....

If you wish interpretation of your Zodiacal sign, inclose ten cents (see rules).

M. G., January 23, 1905—September, 1933.
H. S., February 25, 1911—November, 1934.
N. E. McC., March 21, 1893—July, 1931.
B. Mac. W., February 2, 1887—February, 1938.
L. S., November 10, 1906—May, 1931.
F. D., February 26, 1914—January, 1930.
E. M. B., June 27, 1912—October, 1934.
G. U., August 19, 1890—July, 1932.
L. C., March 16, 1914—March, 1935.
E. E. P., January 22, 1913—December, 1937.
P. L. S., September 11, 1913—September, 1940.
D. C., December 25, 1911—August, 1932.
L. R., February 18, 1893—October, 1934.
W. W., June 16, 1888—February, 1934.
A. G., September 25, 1901—September, 1933.
E. G. M. D., March 2, 1912—February, 1939.
D. L. S., May 27, 1894—October, 1933.
M. J., July 12, 1915—March, 1930.
J. M. W., July 30, 1908—August, 1931.
M. H. C., August 14, 1906—November, 1931.
E. S., April 6, 1910—September, 1931.

SELECTED

You ask no question, S. S., January 6, 1886. Tell me what you want to know about. Can't give a general estimate in this small space. One answer might fill the magazine, you know.

Get the idea firmly embedded in your mind, L. M. B., born January 10, 1890, that a change in circumstances must and can only follow a change in mental point of view. You are at present looking at things through nothing but smoked specs, and blue ones at that. Throw 'em away and try to see what you really want more clearly. Then you can have more of what you want.

Same to you, A. R., born January 11, 1895. Note similarity of these two birthdays. You should see how nearly they asked their questions in the same words.

Don't think yourself an inferior, J. R., born January 23, 1891, and your next two years will be much better.

Yes, if you continue to look for it as you have been doing lately, M. L. B., born January 24, 1894.

Your husband, born February 28, 1899, Bubbles, can very well go ahead occupationally in the near future if he will not be advised by women and if he will avoid acting on the spur of the moment in any way.

"Will I ever be happy?" inquires O. S., born September 29, 1900. Not until you change the objects of your desires from things outside yourself to things within. You are apt to be too much of a pleasure lover who is constantly trying to run away from yourself.

"Will I be one of my oldest sister's heirs?"—Can you beat that one from F. H. B., born July 23, 1883? Just another way of trying to get along on the results of another's labors or possessions. I wonder if you can ask that question without at the same time wanting your sister to hurry up and die. If you are guilty of that error, study your Bible a little more, especially Deuteronomy.

Yes, you and your husband are well mated, Mrs. J. E. T., born February 2, 1909. Hope you didn't make any early mistakes; but, even if you did, this match will help you through a great deal. Congratulations.

THIS COUPON AND A STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE MUST ACCOMPANY REQUEST FOR HANDWRITING ANALYSIS

JOHN FRASER,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

This coupon is not good after Nov. 15. A stamped addressed envelope must be inclosed when forwarding.

I enclose handwriting specimen for
—Service for Sweethearts.
—Your Career.
—Character Analysis.
(Check which you prefer. One coupon must accompany each choice.)

Name.....

Street and No. .....

City..... State.....

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or any service, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at the back of the book.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

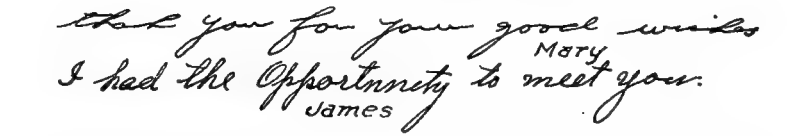
MY first word to my readers to-day is one of apology. Ever since the vacation season closed, the mailman has been working overtime, and by the look on his face I'm inclined to believe that he doesn't care for so much heavy lifting as he has been obliged to do lately. The fact of the matter is our Handwriting and Happiness department is increasing in popularity to such an extent that I am overwhelmed with correspondence.

This, of course, is a healthy sign, and something I don't object to at all. It simply shows that ALL-STORY is getting into the hearts and homes of American people as it never has done before. With this increase of interest, it is taxing not only myself, but my hard-working stenographers to the limit.

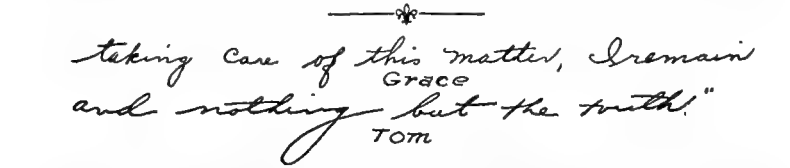
Since every letter that comes to my desk gets my individual attention, you readers who have asked for my advice can see how formidable my task is.

If you will just have a little patience, you may rest assured your postman will deliver my reply without much more delay. Thank you.

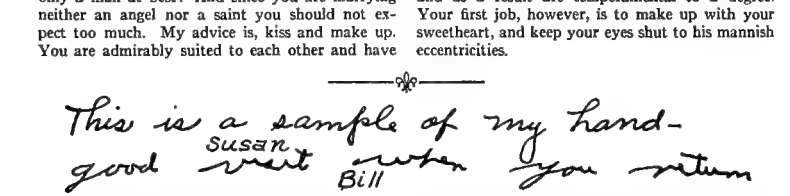
SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS



(Miss Mary T., Hagerstown, Md.) You have evidently made a good choice of a sweetheart. Though James has not the mentality you have, at the same time he is a boy who has the makings of a good man. His greatest weakness, as far as I can see, is his propensity to "put off the evil day." He is a chronic procrastinator, and if you ever get married to him you will have to be the boss in the home. I'm sure James will never do very much unless you keep at him. You impress me as being a very live, go-ahead young woman, with lots of vim. Of course, you are rather inclined to be thin-skinned and "touchy." You will never allow any man to criticize you. You get off the handle too quickly and make life rather unpleasant for those around you when you don't get your own way. I think you are suited to each other to a remarkable extent, and would have no hesitation in saying that you would be very happy with James.



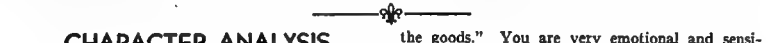
(Miss Grace N., Alexandria, La.) From what I could gather from your letter, I think you are a little too hard in your criticism of Tom. It is true he is emotional and high-strung. A fellow who likes to hear himself talk, and one who is given to exaggeration now and then. Despite this, however, he is not a bad sort of chap. For after all, Grace, the best man in the world is only a man at best! And since you are marrying neither an angel nor a saint you should not expect too much. My advice is, kiss and make up. You are admirably suited to each other and have many things in common. I would like to whisper in your own ear that you are not "all wool and a yard wide" yourself, as far as temper is concerned. I could not call you a boisterous individual, but nevertheless you have a mean disposition when some one tells you "where to get off." You are both impatient and nervously inclined. Both you and Tom love the mystical and as a result are temperamental to a degree. Your first job, however, is to make up with your sweetheart, and keep your eyes shut to his mannish eccentricities.



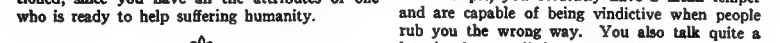
(Miss Susan W., Bay City, Mich.) I can see from the two samples of handwriting you sent me that Bill is not quite your type. He may have many splendid characteristics, but I'm sorry to say they don't reveal themselves very much in his pen strokes. I would call him taciturn, a fellow who is somewhat undependable. He may mean well and promise to make you happy when you get married to him. He may even be conscientious in the matter of earning sufficient income to keep you in comfort. But when it comes to keeping the flame of true love burning, Bill falls short. He is not romantic, and evidently knows very little about the poetry of life which every girl of your temperament craves. The making of money is not everything in life. We see this fact demonstrated every day in our newspapers. And though Bill is a good money-maker, it does not solve for you the question of happiness. All this leads me to say that if I were you I would keep my eyes open and see if you could not take a fancy to a young man who has more in common with you than has Bill. From the specimen of your own handwriting I want to say that the best is not too good for you, Susan.

(Miss Betty E., Urbana, Ill.) In my opinion, Betty, you have not selected a very suitable sweetheart. I may be wrong, but I think Robert would get on to your nerves before you were married to him a week. In the first place, he is a very talkative young man, as doubtless you are already aware. He also loves flattery, and particularly from women. He likes to boss and impress people with his importance. He never thinks twice before he speaks once. He is no good at keeping secrets and is forever blah-blahing all over the lot. Now tell me, what can a girl like yourself do with a fellow like your fiancé? Nothing. If I were you I would give him a wide berth and say you are sorry but that you have given up the thought of getting married to any man. This may sound discouraging after knowing Robert for two months, but since you asked me to give my candid opinion about your boy friend I have done that. Looking at your own penmanship I see you have great imaginative power and might take a fling at the literary field. This might be a good bet for you. Think it over.

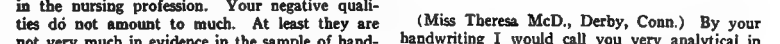
CHARACTER ANALYSIS



(Miss Alice B., Pensacola, Fla.) You impress me as being a girl who is in the habit of hastening slowly. You never get flustered nor excited. Constancy is one of your strongest characteristics and liberality comes next. You have much patience in your make-up, and as a result I think that you are best adapted for some position which would require you to give the utmost amount of service. Nursing would be a splendid outlet for your ability. You are spiritually minded and gravitate to the higher and better things of life. Your quiet, womanly ways would be a real stimulus in the sick room. Your self-sacrifice is also very pronounced in your pen strokes, and that is a trait which is invaluable in the nursing profession. Your negative qualities do not amount to much. At least they are not very much in evidence in the sample of handwriting before me. Your propensity to talk might be curbed, as well as your instinct to be opinionated. On the whole, I am convinced that you would do well in the work I have mentioned, since you have all the attributes of one who is ready to help suffering humanity.



(Miss Virginia S., Washington, D. C.) With your business ability you are capable of becoming a very competent executive in some large organization. Your culture and aggressiveness are above the average for a woman. You have really a man's head on a woman's body. I see leadership qualities in you, as well as a desire to dominate. Sentimentally, you are there "with the goods." You are very emotional and sensitive, with sensibilities as keen as a knife-edge. You have very little imaginative power, and therefore would not amount to much in the literary field. Business is your forte. As far as the particular line of endeavor is concerned it would lie entirely with yourself. Banking or insurance would offer many opportunities to a girl like yourself who has all the earmarks of a born leader. From another angle, I discover that you are very discreet and capable of keeping secrets. You have the sense not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, which is something to be proud of these days. You are built for business and in that direction you should concentrate your efforts.



(Miss Theresa McD., Derby, Conn.) By your handwriting I would call you very analytical in your thinking. You have the faculty of attending to the merest detail, even to the point of being fussy. There are several things I see in your nature which don't appeal to me very much. For example, you evidently have a mean temper and are capable of being vindictive when people rub you the wrong way. You also talk quite a lot—in fact, a little too much for your own good. You like to have authority and lord it over others when you can get away with it. Though you are spiritual to a large degree, you have opinions which are quite materialistic. I notice that you are bucking up against disappointment and discouragement just now, and in consequence are not doing your best work. Your business ability is very marked, and as a woman executive you might be successful. Your mentality is of the logical type, and your constructive way of reasoning things out ought to prove of

great benefit to you in a business career. Altogether, you have some very commendable qualities which should carry you to great heights of success.

With kind regards,

(Miss Jessie H., Pueblo, Col.) You have a wide outlook on life and believe in doing things in a royal way. Particularly when it comes to the spending of money! There is certainly no Scotch in you. I should imagine that you are more material than spiritual. You have business acumen plus. When it comes to will power, you have your share of it, all right. Looking at the sentimental side of your nature, you are romantic and extremely unconventional. You have a certain amount of imagination. On the other hand, you are very easily discouraged and can be quickly hurt by an adverse criticism. From what I can see from your pen strokes you are well poised and never seem to lose your head under any circumstance. Your superabundance of tact stands you in good stead and gets you out of many difficult situations. On the whole, you possess high mental and cultural qualities, and, if you will adjust your weaknesses, I imagine you could do much good in your community.

For the coupon entitling you to John Fraser's services, turn to page 144

Reader's Choice Coupon

Help the editors select just the kind of story you like best by telling them which story in this issue appealed most to you.

This coupon and four others from previous or future issues will enable you to obtain free an original illustration in this issue. Just inclose five coupons in your letter and a drawing will be forwarded to you.

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

An Offer of Marriage.....

Never Mind, Nancy.....

Love Braves the Storm.....

The Avenging Angel.....

Cast Aside .....

The Loser Who Won.....

The Perfect Kiss .....

Cinderella of the Ten Cent Store.....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

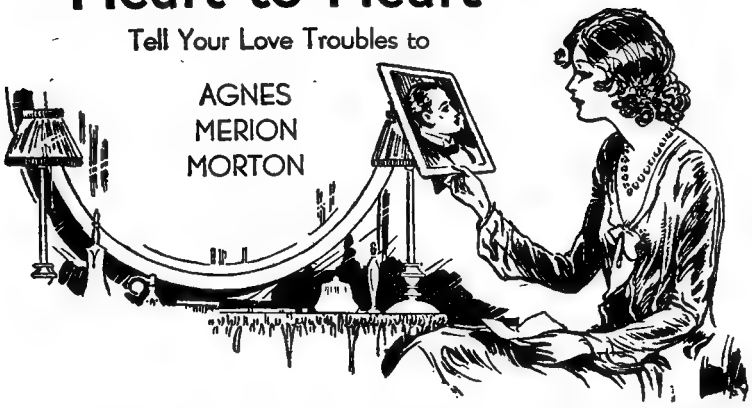
Address .....

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)

Heart-to-Heart

Tell Your Love Troubles to

AGNES
MERION
MORTON



MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to inclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

THE first letters this week concern a subject from which we have always, in this department, carefully and prudishly steered clear. But it is such a burning question, and so many of the letters which come to me deal with it, that I believe it is of general interest and should be given room now and then.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am a girl of sixteen, and have two girl friends I run around with. In fact, we're hardly ever seen apart. We go on dates together all the time. We try to be good sports, but somehow we seem to fail. The fellows think to be a sport you should drink, smoke, and be quite friendly in a certain way—you know what I mean. *We* think to be a good sport is to go to dances with them, to parties, and join in all their sports and go and see people together, their relations and ours, and maybe pet a little, but never go too far. Then they call us poor sports. I think I'm right, don't you? Please write and tell me how to be an all-around sport, such as men would like to have. We do everything but smoke, drink and carry our petting to the limit, and those three things we will never do. Are we right?

Please don't think it's the kind of boys we meet, because we meet some of the nicest ones, and the first few times we're out they're O. K., but then they want us to do one of those three things and we have to draw the line again. After that they never bother about asking us to go out with them again. It's not only a few boys we meet; it's all of them. Are all boys like that? We go to school and the most popular girls are that type and are always sought after. We have plenty of dates, but hardly ever with the same boys, and we hate to think that boys won't go with us again. It's not that we're lacking something else because we're O. K. till they start to get *fresh*, and then it seems we're all wrong. We are of the right build; we dress right; we aren't hard to look at, but it's that one thing that holds us back. If we yielded we would be very popular, but we have too much pride to ever yield. Please—oh, please!— help us.

PATSY AND MARY AND LOU.

I wish I could take you into my private office and read to you from the files of letters which no one but myself has ever seen. From many of them I have even torn the names and addresses because I would not want any one else to know

who wrote them. But I have kept them because they are human documents and they help me to answer just such letters as yours.

An occasional girl may get away with it, but the great sum of experience shows that it pays to be "good." Not so much from the high moral and religious reasons, though our early training helps us to withstand temptation, as because a woman always suffers if she is not good. Some of those letters are from the wrong kind of man; some are from the girl who has given herself just to the one man she loves—and has to pay nature's highest price for it. And he can be "made" to marry her, of course, but who wants a husband upon whom she was forced? And many a time he gets other fellows to boast that she has allowed them, too, to take liberties with her, and then she is out of luck all around. I have many a letter like that. I have made arrangements for many a girl to enter the nearest Florence Crittenton Home, where she can stay during her time of waiting and until her unnamed child is six months old.

Occasionally I have letters from the more knowing and sophisticated ones, the kind of girl who thinks she's brazen and argues that she has as much right as a man has to be "free." She lives up to her beliefs, too, is promiscuous, not immoral, because she sees no harm in what she does, but unmoral. She does not care. She wants to have a "good time." Then she really falls in love—and the One Man in the World recoils from her. Or she overhears—or is told—two of the men she has been free with, talking, and she realizes what they really think of her. Or she just gets sick unto death of the life she is leading.

Why, Patsy (and Mary and Lou), I know one college community where the boys keep an open list of the girls they run around with, checking off just how far they can go with each one. A fellow who cannot "make" the most common ones is guyed unmercifully. And as for such a thing as keeping quiet, being honorable and not telling what privileges a girl allows, it is unheard of. They brag to one another and use the coarsest terms to describe the girls. These young men are from the "best" families in the country, gentlemen and the sons of gentlemen, and the least a gentleman is supposed to do is never to tell. Alas for our "gentlemen"!

I believe there are other ways to interest boys—the better class of boy, that is, the ones who are worth while interesting. Sex is important, of course, but it is not all of life, and as those who cheapen themselves use it it is only the muck of life. Just at present those boys are curious, using a new power. They do not understand that loss of health and manhood may easily result—that they may pay a penalty before they're forty, as well as the girl. Naturally they go around with the girls who give themselves freely, but do they marry those girls? Not often. I've had young fellows right here in New York say to me, "I'd like to marry. I can support a wife. I'm tired of racketing around. But I want a girl who hasn't been with everybody. I want a girl like my mother was. The things those girls do are just unthinkable about your mother."

Well, there are lots of good girls in New York as well as other places, but they generalize from the few they know. And so peculiarly is a man's mind fashioned that he thinks it is all right for him to take but not for the girl to give, though he may have persuaded her to lower her standard of conduct for him alone, and used every lie he could think of in that persuasion. "I'll never tell." "There's no danger." "I'll love you just the same—why, that's what love means." There is danger. He will *not* love you just the same, and it is *not* what love means. Love is not merely passion and selfishness. And so on, and so on, and so on. And then he is the first to fling it in her face that he can't "trust" her. Believe it or not.

Dear girls, I think there is some excuse, sad but plentiful excuse, for the girl who gives way before an overwhelming love. If she cares for a man she wants to yield to him, and she believes everything he says. But to act like that, to be even more promiscuous than the higher grade of animal is, just because they are males and you are a female—well, that's "boloney." That's the only word I can think of to describe it—pardon the slang, especially since it's stale slang.

Drinking is of course bad for anybody. As for smoking, however, don't confuse that with morals. It's better for a young girl not to, but there's nothing inherently wrong about it. It might even give you something to do with your hands and mouth—to help keep them out of mischief.

The next time you go to a movie with a boy, just one couple or three, why don't you take them home with you for something to eat afterward? Don't sit somewhere in a parked car and pet and get on that dangerous subject. Take them home, and rummage in the ice box and bring out the "makings" of sandwiches, or cheese dreams, or a creamed dish, something to serve on toast. They needn't know that the refreshments are especially provided. Let 'em think they're left-overs. Doll up in pretty aprons and cook whatever it is, and make a pan of cocoa, or if it is getting to be spring, some cold drink. Do you know how to make a cheese rarebit that won't curdle or string? If this answer weren't out of sight too long already, I'd give you a recipe. Anyway, maybe you know.

And there are so many things to do, so many things to talk about. Most even halfway decent boys have a hobby of some sort—get them started talking about it. Or read enough of some current events in the papers to ask intelligent questions about it, and then sit back and say no

one ever explained it so clearly before. There are so many decent, clean things to do and talk about that it seems a pity to concentrate on that one questionable one.

You will be glad, when the real man and the real love comes, that you have kept yourself for him. That you have been true to your ideals. And meanwhile, I advise you all to prepare yourselves, as men do, to face the world as well equipped as you know how to be, to work up whatever talent God has given you, to train yourselves in the work that seems most attractive. So that you can take your places among the workers of the world fitted to advance and overcome difficulties. So that when the time comes you won't get married just for the sake of getting married, just because some one asks you, but because you love and want one particular man, because you love him with an equal love and not because you want to be supported. I wish all girls were brought up with that idea—to find the work they are best suited for, by nature and disposition, and not just to go into an office until they marry, to fill in the time, so to speak, until they can begin to live.

One last thing, my dears—as for being a sport, perhaps it takes the very highest type of sportsmanship to stick to what you know is right.

Some time soon I am going to print some of those sad letters from girls who did not wait, but this week there is room for only one more on this subject, from a different angle.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

My sister and I came to New York about a year ago, and we took a little two-room apartment because we doped out it would be just as cheap as living in a boarding house, or in a furnished room and eating out, and besides we would have our own home. Now every man we entertain seems to get the idea that we have that apartment for a purpose. Why is that, Mrs. Morton? Are all fellows like that, or is it just city fellows? Were the boys we knew at home decent to us only because they knew us all our lives and came to call on us in our father's home?

They're such cheap skates, too! My sister said the other day, "These guys think if they take you out and buy you a ham sandwich they own you body and soul," and I swear it's the truth. Just for instance: a week or two ago a man I knew slightly asked me to go to a show with him. We hurried up after work and got in at afternoon prices. Then he came home with me and expected to spend the night. I almost passed out. He hadn't even tried to kiss me first, or get warmed up! I said to him, "See here, you! If I ever give myself to a man I don't love I'm going to get something out of it, see? Nice clothes, or the rent of this apartment for six months. I don't know how you fellows get that way. You imagine you can spend sixty-five cents to take a girl to a show and then come home and stay with her. What makes you think you're elected? If all the men in the world wanted me you'd be the last one I'd take. Here's your sixty-five cents—take it and get out!" I put three quarters on the table, and would you believe it, Mrs. Morton, he picked them up and put a dime down for change. I said, "Oh, keep that, too; you paid my subway fare, you know." And he waved his hand as if he was being generous, and said, "Oh, that's all right." Then he put his hat on and went out. Can you tie that?

I suppose that some *nice-minded* men reading this will think I'd have taken him on if he'd offered me enough. Well, that's not the idea at all. I haven't come to it yet, nor my sister either. We can pay our own rent and buy all the clothes we need—we don't go out much evenings. And neither of us has met the man we'd want to care for. I'd like to be in love, as much as any girl, but it's hard to meet a man you can love. Most of them don't seem worth loving. They have just one thought in their heads, and if that's the kind they are, I don't want them, that's all. If a fellow tells you he won't go with you unless you belong to him, it's just an alibi. How long would they go with you if you did? If that's all they want of you they aren't worth going with. I'd rather be with my own sex, or even alone. Why, I don't even want to *kiss* every man I meet, let alone go any farther!

DOLLY.

The only possible answer to this is: Attagirl, Dolly!

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am a boy twenty-four years of age. At the age of nineteen I eloped with a girl of eighteen. We obtained forgiveness from our parents and settled down to show the world that we had made a model marriage. I was employed in a power plant, and was required to work nights half of the time. We bought a home and furnished it, going into debt for both. I settled down to pay for our home and furniture, and make as good a husband as possible.

Two years later the furniture was paid for and we were planning on some investment for our surplus cash. (We were very wise, we two.) But I returned home one night, unexpectedly, and found her in the arms of another man. I divorced her and gave her possession of our little girl, who was then a year old, but I am not required to pay any alimony or support the child.

Before our marriage I had been keeping company with a girl three years younger than I, and after my divorce I asked her for a date. She told me, "Nothing doing." Said I had done her dirty once and I was not going to get another chance. (Although I had never spoken of marriage to her.) I never asked her for any more dates, but some months later a girl friend told me that this girl wanted a date with me, for the following night, and for me to call her up. I did, and the date was made. The next time I called her up she refused to talk to me, so I called her no more.

About five months ago she called me, and after a chat we hung up, making no dates. She did this several times, and I began calling her, and in passing the house would call in and chat awhile. Two months ago I asked her for another date, and got it, and from then on dates were easy. If I don't call her every day she will call me,

and she does not hesitate to ask me for a date, so we are together almost every day.

Her attitude toward me is friendly, but it stops there. When the subject of marriage comes up she says she does not intend to marry for three or four years yet. She has stopped dating any one but me, although I never asked her to, and she shows a tendency to resent it when I date any one else.

I think that I always loved this girl, but did not want to wait for her to become of age. She will tell some people that she thinks a lot of me, and others get the impression that she does not. When I ask her she tells me that she likes me and that she likes to be with me, but still she builds a wall of reserve around herself that I cannot penetrate. Do you think that this girl is playing with me, having a good time at my expense, with the intention of putting me in the discard at some favorable opportunity, in order to get even with me for the fancied wrong? Or do you think she is serious and is afraid that if I know it I will lose interest? Don't tell me to have a talk with her, for she won't talk about it, and is very evasive when approached on the subject.

I wouldn't mind waiting for two or three years for her if I could be sure she was not just playing with me, but at that if I'm going to wait three years, don't you think two or three times a week is enough to see her?

WALTER ROY.

Do you really love this girl you are going with? If you do, all I can say is prove it to her every way you can. I am no mind-reader, especially since I do not know the young lady at all, but it seems to me she must be very fond of you or she would not want to be with you so much. Very few girls are vindictive enough to give all their time to a man in order to "get even" with him. It may very well be that she is not sure of you, since you left her and married the other girl, even if you were under no obligation to her, and so she is wary of showing her feelings.

I think, as you say, it would be wiser to have only two or three regular dates a week, and you certainly can manage that. If there is something "extra special" she wants to be taken to in between times, the dates could be movable, of course, but otherwise you can let it be understood that you will save Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday for her—and ask her if she is willing to save them for you. Jolly her a little. Say, "Since you won't marry me for three or four years, I'm afraid you'll get tired of me if you see me every night." Pretend to take it for granted that you are engaged. See what she says to that. And if you love her, show it. Don't be afraid to tell her. Love is the most beautiful thing in the world, and there is nothing to be ashamed of about expressing it. If you make her sure of the warmth and strength of your affection she may be less stingy with her own. And if she feels none, that is no reflection on you anyway. It would be, rather, a reflection on her if she took so much and expected to give nothing in return. What other friends say or think need not worry you at all. People see things through different eyes, distorted by their own ideas and prejudices. Their judgment is rarely to be trusted, for why should she show the true state of her heart to others when she will not show it to you?

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am coming to you with a very funny problem. At least, it would sound funny to any one else. To begin with, I am married to a man whom I adore and also respect very deeply. He has most of the qualities that inspire respect: courage, honesty, success, intelligence and patience. In times of trouble he is a rock to lean on. He is something more than a "good provider" and my financial and material future is exceedingly well cared for. All of which sounds as if I had married the ideal. I haven't. Here is the other side of the picture.

My beloved husband—although he is actually six months younger than I am—we were married ten years ago when we were both twenty-three—treats me as a very nice little girl who is to be given everything that *he* decides is good for her and nothing else. I am not allowed to smoke; my hair is long because he likes it so and I live on an allowance for most of which I have to account. And if I don't do what I'm told I sit on his knee and receive a lecture on my wrong-doing. And if I persist in being "naughty" I get spanked just like a six-year-old.

I know that's funny. Sure, but for a woman thirty-three years old to be turned across her husband's knee and soundly spanked is not funny. It's outrageous and also painful. This joke about eating off the mantelpiece is not much of a joke. I've done it. I did it last week when I overdrew my bank account and he found out about it and I got the soundest paddling (with a hairbrush) that I ever did get.

I hope you see what I'm up against. I don't want a divorce or separation, but I do want to get my husband to start considering me as an individual, not a little child to be disciplined. Please answer through the magazine. I don't want my name to appear anywhere.

REBA W.

Yes, a good many tragedies have their funny side—to those who don't have to live them. But, Reba, the time to stop such treatment was at the beginning; the first time it happened should have been the last. However, it's too late to say that now. We must see what we can do for you in spite of the fact that you have gone on enduring it for ten years.

Financial independence is a woman's only safeguard. When a man supports you, particularly if he is the "masterful" type of man, he imagines it must be on his own terms. Now of course you could have him arrested for assault and get separate maintenance, with full support, if you wanted to. In your part of the country you could not get an absolute divorce. But you don't want that, the publicity would be very trying, if a reporter got hold of the court records.

A muscular woman could resist his efforts at chastisement, and give him as good as he gave, but I presume he is physically stronger than you. So you must try strategy. You must think what possible way you have of earning money for yourself, even if it is not necessary, and then go about earning it.

If you have a talent—musical, perhaps—develop it; if you have business ability, train it. Tell your husband you are bored with the movies or bridge, or whatever it is you do with your afternoons. Say you want to do something worth while and constructive in the world. If he won't "let" you take up anything else (the idea of a man using the word "let" to a grown woman!) write again and we will think of another way. You need not be afraid to send me your own name, Reba. If you merely address an envelope to yourself I will use it to return your answer, and not even make a note of it to keep in the office. Remember that I could not betray you to any one who knows you even if I would do such a thing.

You need not fear that this thing I have suggested would be treacherous to your dear lord and master. It will give you something worth while to spend your time on; it will automatically fit you to be a self-supporting, self-respecting woman; and at the same time it may go far toward showing him that you are growing up, after all. You are the only person who can prove to him that you are *not* "a six-year-old child," and this is the best way to prove it.

Please let me write to you; it saves time, and is so much more satisfactory. Meanwhile, don't overdraw your account again!

Angeline—It is very difficult for any one at a distance to advise a girl how to reduce, for I know nothing about your constitution or make-up, or habits—whether you work or go to school (school, I suppose, since you are so young) and all that. One thing it is always safe to do is eat whole wheat bread instead of white bread, and cut out potatoes unless they have been baked. A boiled or mashed potato is fattening.

Eat a lot of fruit, too—an apple in the morning, another or an orange in the middle of the morning, and more in the middle of the afternoon. In that way you "kid your stomach along," if I may use the expression, and are not so likely to overeat at regular meal times. Besides, fruit is good for everybody and none of us eat enough of it. But if you want a regular diet list, you should go to your family physician, because he understands you.

Then exercise regularly every day—at the thing you enjoy most. Swimming is excellent—almost anything is. Walking is not strenuous enough, for most of us don't walk *right*. But swimming or skating or some sort of game will make you hard instead of flabby, and then a large person never looks so "fat." Dear, you are terribly young to be seriously in love. I want you to train down and look trim for your own sake, and your own comfort—not merely to attract one boy. Go with all of them, Angeline. Look around you, and have a lot of friends, both boys and girls, but don't encourage yourself to believe you are seriously in love yet a while.

Long Parted—There is no reason on earth why you should not continue to write to your friend and go with him again next summer, and let the friendship progress along natural lines. Only don't encourage yourself to think you are in love now. Very young people are often—usually, in fact—mistaken when they believe themselves in love. Witness your affair with M.

Bill sounds, on the whole, like a boy who is likely to grow into a better, stronger man than M. does, although you can never be sure about such young fellows. They may develop in a way that will surprise you. But I would not hold Bill's little escapade against him—that might have happened to anybody. He seems to have learned a lesson from it, anyway, and to have taken his medicine like a man.

Bound by Fate—What, again? Or is it yet? No one can help you unless you will help yourself, unless you will open your mind to the possibility that there is just as much in life for you as there is for anybody else, indeed, much, much more than there is for many. You are young; you are strong; you are well educated. You can have everything you want, if you will only want the right things. Instead, you hug your unhappiness to your bosom, foster it, encourage it; you are getting more and more ingrown all the time. That is the way to drive people from you, to keep off love and joy and all good things, not to attract them. Perhaps you *prefer* your misery? Then why write to me about it? We don't make our own lives, no. That is, we don't make the circumstances of our own lives. But any one can change his own life by facing those circumstances bravely instead of cravenly. Anything is possible to those who exert their will power. We see it around us every day—some people facing real trouble and leading worth-while lives in spite of loss and disappointment; others making themselves miserable and refusing to be otherwise when their griefs are only imaginary.

"One ship drives east and another drives west
With the self-same winds that blow.
'Tis the set of the sails
And not the gales
Which tells us the way to go.

"Like the winds of the sea are the ways of fate
As we voyage through life;
'Tis the set of the soul
That decides its goal,
And not the calm nor the strife."

The Lonesome Club

Conducted by DOROTHEA DALE

MAKE friends! Join the Lonesome Club and soon you will be getting more letters than any one you know.

Here's how to do it: if you wish your letter published in these pages write to Mrs. Dale, care of ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City, and describe yourself. Try to make it as interesting as possible—tell little things about yourself that will make others want to write to you.*

If you wish to communicate with the pals whose letters appear here, inclose your letter in a plain, stamped envelope and send it to Mrs. Dale. No letters will be forwarded without the extra stamp.

If you are a girl, you may write to other girls; if a man, to other men.

Please do not ask Mrs. Dale for the address of any one.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I'm nearly seventeen, five feet eight, dark curly hair and blue eyes, love especially tennis, swimming, dancing and skating. I also like to read and write—so come on, and I'll exchange snaps and souvenirs. M. F. OF ALBERTA.

I'm a young man of twenty-four, five feet five, blond hair and blue eyes; some people say I'm not bad to look at. I love going to the movies, also dancing and skating. I've been in Canada for six years and also over a great deal of Europe. I'm Danish by birth. HENRY.

Won't some one write to a lonesome brown-haired-and-eyed girl of fourteen who likes sports, dancing, and letters? ELLA OF VERMONT.

I just completed business school and am working in the Edison Light Co.'s office. Five feet two, brown eyes, black hair, love all sports, and will answer any letter. ANNABEL OF MASS.

I am eighteen and a blonde; I'd like snappy letters from snappy girls who like snappy times. Come on, give your playmate a break!

SPEEDY.

I'm a girl, thirteen, considered good-looking, light blue eyes and dark brown wavy hair. I love music and play the violin and piano. I have traveled for ten months in Scotland; hence my nickname, SCOTTY.

I'm a Western girl, though living in the East at present. I'd like to hear from pen pals in Montana and other States. Dark brown hair, blue eyes, five feet two, and wear eight-cornered white-gold-rimmed glasses. Hobbies: reading, music, movies, camping, hiking, horseback riding, traveling. CLEO OF MINN. AND MONTANA.

Not exactly lonely, but want new pen pals. Five feet four, blue eyes and curly brown hair. I'm Irish and act and look it, and can I dance? And how! I like all sports, play the uke like one possessed of old Nick, nineteen, and free from any cares. If there aren't enough letters to push the lid off my mail box I'll be disappointed. Come on, you hoboes, and do your pen acts. SHORTY FROM WYOMING.

Hello, everybody! I love all kinds of sports and am what is called a bookworm. I'm seventeen, dark brown hair, brown eyes, four feet eight. Write and tell me a cure for loneliness.

RENE OF CHICAGO.

I'm a young man of twenty-one, pleasing personality, five feet eleven, dark brown hair and fair complexion. Have a keen eye for the serious things in life. Most of my limited knowledge has been gained in the school of hard knocks.

Though I'm a soldier clerk I'd like to hear from those living on farms, especially pals in Southern States. Such letters may not only remove my loneliness, but may improve my small store of knowledge. SERIOUS VERVAL.

Is there room for a very lonesome Irishman in your club? I am thirty, brown hair and eyes, five feet seven, weigh 128. Served two years and seven months in the C. E. F. in France, was wounded twice, am O. K. now. I'd very much like to hear from people all over the U. S. A. and Canada, and I promise to answer one and all. HARVEY OF NORTH ONTARIO.

Peep! Peep! Gangway! Clear the track! I'm five feet two, dark brown hair and eyes, enter high school this year, but I want pals all ages and sizes. Dancing, swimming, canoeing and skating are my favorite sports; also, I can play a fairly good game of bridge. My favorite movie stars are Greta Garbo and Buddy Rogers; I'd like to hear what other people think about these two. Won't some of you ALL-STORY fans write to a girl who loves to answer letters? I'll sit back and twiddle my thumbs until I receive 'em. For want of a better name I sign myself FRENCHY OF HUDSON.

This is what I am: red hair, fair complexion, snappy blue eyes, not at all bad to look at, so I'm told. Nationality, English, but don't think I'm conceited because I'm not. Sweet sixteen, a senior in high, love to dance, swim and love any kind of sports. Work as a mother's helper in the summer to get through school. Will exchange snaps with all. "BEATS."

Wanted: A few pen pals.
Description: Five feet three, windblown bob, brown hair, green eyes, cherry-red lips, considered good-looking, age, fifteen. Promise to answer within twenty-four hours every letter I get.
A LONELY HOOSIER.

I am a widow of thirty, refined and nice disposition, I've been alone a good deal and would be grateful to get in touch with some one as lonely as I am. I love a good play, a good love story, and good company.
F. V. A., Brooklyn.

I get so blue sometimes—I'm a quiet sort of girl, and shy. But I always try to smile and be gay. I'm twenty, five feet three, dark brown hair and eyes. I go to movies a lot and like to dance, but I simply love to read. I am Polish. I wonder who will be the first to write—there must be some one in this big world who will.
BLUE LOU.

I am twenty, light-haired and blue-eyed, very fond of all sports, especially swimming. I also enjoy reading books and writing letters. I'm a stenographer and like my work immensely. I have lots of time and plenty of paper, so write and I'll answer pronto.
ELSIE OF MASS.

I'm a girl of fourteen and as lonesome as they get them. I'm a blonde, big blue-gray eyes, four feet ten. I like music and outdoor sports, reading, dogs, parties, dancing and letter writing. I'd sure love to have a bushel of letters.
LONESOME MARY.

Seventeen, brown curly hair and large brown eyes, five feet three. I like all kinds of sports, dancing best. I play a violin, piano, and sing quite well. I enjoy the ALL-STORY stories, and would like to write to pen pals.
GERRY FROM OHIO.

Seventeen, auburn hair, dark brown eyes, four feet eleven. I'll answer letters from every one and everywhere and would like to tell of our famous smelter and mines. I enjoy all sports.
SUNNY OF CANADA.

I'm a girl of eighteen just recuperating from a nervous breakdown. Have been in bed for almost two years and would like some pen pals. I lived in Washington for sixteen years and have had many exciting adventures. I'm five feet seven, weigh 124, light brown hair, blue eyes, and not bad to look at, so my chums say. I'm collecting stamps and will trade if some one wants to. Oh, come to my rescue! PATTY OF CHICAGO.

Five feet three, brown hair and hazel eyes, sixteen years old and weigh 102, not hard to look at. I love all kinds of sports, especially dancing, swimming and ice skating. I'll guarantee to exchange snapshots and answer all letters. I'm not allowed out very much to make friends.
CHARM FROM NEW YORK STATE.

Sixteen, junior in high, mischief-filled dark blue eyes, red-gold hair, fair complexion, and a temper—Woops! I'm fond of boating, riding bronchos, playing softball, swimming, driving a good speedy car and dancing. I'm pretty good at the latter. I have loads of friends of both sexes, so am not lonesome, but enjoy writing letters, so I thought of joining this swell club.
BRICK OF CANADA.

I'm nineteen, blond, blue eyes, weigh 119. I'm considered attractive, but most girls are, these days. I have had many thrilling experiences, so will be glad to impart them to any one who writes to MARGY.

I'm an English girl of twenty-two, auburn hair, fair skin, green eyes, weigh 129, average height. If I were to say I'm attractive I'd sound conceited, so I'll let you judge for yourselves. I write short stories and verses, so am interested in all types of people. Will appreciate any letters I receive. MARY LOU.

Here is a lonesome boy who would just love a few pen pals. Black hair and blue eyes, six feet two, and love sports and dancing.
B. T. OF N. J.

Please take pity on me and print my letter. I live in a small town where we all know each other and nobody seems to get along without gossiping about some one else. I haven't many friends—I chummed around with one girl for five years and recently she married and moved away, so I feel rather lost. I'm almost twenty, five feet five, brown hair and eyes, and am not the

worst-looking girl in town. I'd like to hear from far and near. I love dancing, baseball, and the sea. NAN OF NEW ENGLAND.

I'm sixteen and in the junior year of high. I'm lonely and would like some pals. Light wavy hair, blue eyes, five feet four. Will gladly exchange photographs. Come on, everybody, write. BETTY IN INDIANA.

I'm a girl five feet two, brown hair and eyes. I want every one to write, I don't care who you are. I'll do my best to exchange snapshots with those who write me interesting letters. LONELY PRINCESS.

Can you find me a few friends? I'm quite a way from home and haven't one. It gets lonesome evenings as my hubby is a sailor and away quite a bit. I am modern, five feet eight, brown wavy hair, brown eyes, thin, seventeen, and I have a daughter less than two months old. I'm fond of sports and everything in general. LOU ANN, CALIFORNIA.

Oh, boy, do I like to write to unknown pals or not! I'll say I do. I'm sixteen, five feet five, medium brown, very curly hair, gray-blue eyes. Love outdoor sports, golf, baseball, a little tennis. I'm a sophomore in high, and a lover of pets, especially cats. HOOSIER GIRL.

I'm so lonely and blue. I will answer every letter written to me in either French or English. I'm five feet less one inch, have great big black eyes, long golden curly hair, am twenty-one and I know a lot about actors and actresses. Come on, everybody, fill the postman's bag. I'm ready to send every one a long letter. BLUER THAN BLUE.

The Lonesome Club has beckoned me on. Perhaps there aren't any who would care to write to an "old married woman." But I'm not so old at that, just twenty-seven. Considered attractive and always try to be pleasant. Have four children, but gee, I get so lonesome. I have the most wonderful hubby in the world, but he is away quite a bit, so I have lots of time to write. Have been in this town only a short time, and a few interesting letters would surely chase away the blues. LONELY CHICAGO.

You don't know how lonely I am, and I crave for girls to write to me. I'm sixteen, five feet three, brown eyes and hair. I love to dance, ride, and write letters. I live on a farm and will exchange snapshots. LONESOME LU.

I don't get around much, so would like to hear from some pals. When home I read and work around the house. I'm a commercial traveler in the winter, was captain in the A. E. F. at one time and did a little fishing in the Maritime Provinces. Just now not doing much except wanting to write letters. LESLIE OF CANADA.

Although I'm not lonesome I love to write letters. I'm sweet sixteen, brown water-waved hair and brown eyes, four feet eleven and interested in swimming, skating, tennis, horseback riding, miniature golf, and am a baseball, football and basket ball enthusiastic fan. I'm a junior in high and would like to hear from high school girls, also girls interested in sororities. SOMERVILLE PAL.

I'm not lonesome, but like letters from pen friends. My hair is dark brown, inclined to curl, large dark eyes with long black eyelashes. Am five feet six and slender, married, nineteen years old. Please, everybody, write and exchange snapshots. PEG FROM MISSISSIPPI.

I'm another of these young people always wanting more than they have: hundreds of pen pals. I'm not lonesome, but I do get blue often. I have quite a family to take care of: my own two boys, two brothers-in-law, my husband and sometimes my mother-in-law also. I'm five feet, with medium brown hair that always needs a trip to the beauty parlor, twenty, and not extra when it comes to looks, but get by with a smile. Everybody please write—I promise not to be too busy to answer. I'm so excited thinking about all the wonderful pals I'm going to have I can hardly wait to see this in print. BABE OF THE PRAIRIES.

ALL-STORY is just great, but I like the Lonesome Club better than any other part of it. I'm looking for some true pals who are single and from fifteen to twenty. I'm five feet two, a brunette, very fond of sports and dancing, lots of pep, and do I have a sense of humor? Suppose you readers write and see. Let's make friends; I guarantee snappy answers. JEWELL OF TEXAS.

I'll bet it's hard work to pick out some one with whom to correspond from the bids listed, but I'm going to trust to luck. I haven't many "qualifications," but will do my best to write nice letters to anybody between fourteen and eighteen, as long as they write decent letters. I'm interested in French, swimming, riding, cycling, tennis, skating, 'n—'n,—oh, write and find out. Please send your photo. To the one who comes nearest to describing me I'll send a surprise. Oh, yes, I'm a girl. TRUSTING-TO-LUCK LUE.

This is honest-to-goodness begging—I want some one to write to so much. I'm twenty, married, have a little girl of two, and my husband works at night, so you can imagine how lonely I get. Here's watching the mailman! LOLLIPOP.

I am a girl simply wild about the stage; my ambition is to dance and act. I am fifteen, five feet three, blue eyes, light brown wavy hair, considered attractive. I'd love to hear from you all, especially people in some way or other in contact with the theater. MICKEY.

I'm a dreamer, but aren't we all? Girls, I'm just fifteen, brown hair, blue eyes, weigh 104, five feet two, lonesome. Have traveled and visited Hollywood and Europe. So come on, girls, shake the rust off your pens and write to A DREAMER.

Hello, World, dog-gone ya! How many of you are going to help me with my postcard collection? I'd like to have cards from every State

and from as many countries as I can get. I also have a hobby for collecting pictures and have quite a stack of my own to rush right back to every one who sends me one of theirs. I'm twenty-one, brown hair and eyes, weigh 110, five feet five, and think ALL-STORY the best yet.

DODO FROM OKLA.

I am twelve years old and a campfire girl. I have light hair, golden when the sun shines on it, blue eyes and quite tall. I love adventures, mysteries and excitement, have many friends here, but don't get many letters. I am a motherless child; my mother died when I was only five months old. My aunt and uncle took me to live with them until two or three years ago, and my aunt was very kind, but not like a real mother. Now I'm keeping house for my father, who is gone most of the days, and it is lonesome for me. PEN PAL-LESS GIRL.

Two lonesome girls of fifteen and sixteen would like to have pals. I, Brickie, have dark wavy hair, light blue eyes, fond of all sports. Evey, who is sitting here at my left, has dark brown hair, wavy, blue eyes, weighs 100. Evey loves all kinds of sports. We are very popular, not a bit hard to look at. BRICKIE AND EVEY.

I'm a Spanish girl of eighteen, five feet three, weigh 108. I am a tap dancer, have been in this country four years. I've recently moved to a new town and am very lonesome. I like all sports. Please everybody write to

SENORITA.

I am a young man thirty years of age and through a mistake in life am at present incarcerated in a penitentiary. I still have another year to serve. I'm all alone in this world and wonder if one of your many friends would be willing to correspond with me. I've traveled along the coast and would try to write interesting letters. Hope some one will think kindly of me in spite of my predicament.

HOWARD H.

I'm a lonesome young man as last year I lost my darling mother, my only friend. I'd like to have some one to write to that would try to make me a happy man. I'm of Jewish faith, twenty-five, black curly hair, blue eyes, weigh 170, very good-looking, so they say.

AL OF OHIO.

My one great wish has always been to have some pen friends in America, but I never knew how to get hold of any before. My undying thanks are yours for giving me the opportunity —at least, I hope so. I'm twenty-three, five feet six, weigh 136, hazel eyes, rather pale complexion, brown wavy hair. I live in a small village and have few friends. I'm passionately fond of dancing, ride, play tennis and golf, and have a good singing voice. All sport appeals to me, and of course I'm a great reader, my books being my dearest friends. I'd like to hear from people my own age and older. Hoping to have a huge mail soon,

LONESOME BABS, SOUTH AFRICA.

I adore writing letters. I'm eighteen, five feet four, dark hair, black eyes, slender, considered good-looking. I love music and books. Please don't disappoint me—I'll answer every one

GIGGLES OF MICHIGAN.

I'm a young married woman of twenty-three, brown hair and eyes, five feet two, weigh 105. I have a wonderful hubby and a dear little girl of four. I love all kinds of sports, but best of all to swim. DOT OF S. F.

I am sixteen and not lonesome, just craving pen pals. Don't think I'm conceited, but I was told I'm very good-looking and have personality. I love to dance, swim and write letters.

GIGGLES OF BROOKLYN.

I'm much interested in your Lonesome Club. I'm five feet three, blue eyes, and a very jovial character. Fond of dancing and all sports, a stenographer by occupation.

AIMEE OF CALIFORNIA.

I'm a girl of fifteen with blond natural wavy hair, deep blue eyes, weigh 118, considered good-looking. I'm interested in all sports. I live in a small town on the desert where there are lots of snakes, gila monsters, chuckwalla lizards, and horned toads. LONESOME OF ARIZONA.

I'm a senior in high, eighteen, slender, dark brown hair and blue-green eyes. Tanned complexion at present; my looks would pass in a crowd. My best friend just moved away, and I feel so very lonesome without her that I need lots of pen pals to make up this loss. I'm interested in shows, autoing, parties, picnics, traveling, basket ball, camping, fishing, walking, movies, plays, boating, swimming, tennis, skating, singing, art, playing the piano, hunting, canoeing, golfing, taking long hikes, reading and writing letters, so you see I'm not hard to suit. I'd especially like to hear from some one who has done a bit of traveling. I can speak a little French and Latin. Success to ALL-STORY.

LONELY DOT OF N. J.

I'm a college girl of twenty, blond and fond of most anything that affords any kind of amusement. My favorite sports are swimming, hiking and coasting, but I am interested in all sports as we are engaged in all of them at school. I enjoy good movies, books, and dancing. Will enjoy letters from any one, anywhere, any time.

PAT FROM WISCONSIN.

From now on I'll be a constant reader of ALL-STORY. I live on the New England coast and would like to hear from pen pals from all over the country. I'm very fond of books and music and play the saxophone. I'm twenty-one and have blond curly hair. Write and see what kind of pen pal a New Englander can be.

BETTY OF MASS.

Hello! New Jersey speaking. Would any one care to write to an old married woman of twenty-five? Get this—twenty-five years *old*, not married that long. To be exact, just a year since I said "I do." Have no one to keep me company all day and would be glad to hear from some other "Mrs." Perhaps some soon-to-be "Mrs." would write me, too. Come on, get

ambitious! Will exchange photos, receipts, or what have you? ESTELLE.

I'm a prep school student in my junior year who thinks he knows it all. I'm eighteen, five feet nine, large build. My hobbies are short-wave radio and advanced photography (all branches); football, swimming, horseback riding, canoeing and skiing are my favorite sports. I can always drive to a secluded spot at night. In the summer I am a worker in the signal department of a railroad. Depechez, "Hams," photographers, and every one else, and write to

A LONESOME HARMONITE OF THE EAST.

Won't some one write to me? I'm married and have no children and no work to go to, so I have lots of time to write and do enjoy letters. I'm brown-haired and brown-eyed, love to read and cook and love music.

ELSIE OF S. C.

I am twenty-five, five feet nine, fair complexion, blue eyes, blond hair, rather tanned as the result of two years in the tropics. I have been in the United States Navy that long, and have two more years to serve. I am a submarine man, and do some traveling under water; have about 9,000 miles to my name. I am in the hospital, but am almost well now.

CHARLES OF HAWAII.

I would like to correspond with young people of other countries, people who are lonely or cripples and like the same things I do. I like ALL-STORY so much, particularly the Lonesome Club. MILDRED OF WISCONSIN.

Two fast young fellows in Cuba, the land where the summer spends the winter and the sun shines all the time, would like to hear from every one of the same type. We are both from the good old U. S. A. and travel a great deal. We're great sportsmen and can tell some of the thrills of sailing, and—oh, well, if you want to receive good snappy letters just get the old pen going. As for a description, we have plenty of pictures, and we want to receive plenty, too. So make it snappy and we will tell you all the wonders of a tropical moon, a canoe drifting across silver waters and—gosh! BUDDIES.

ALL-STORY'S DEPARTMENT SERVICE

If you wish to have your handwriting analyzed by John Fraser, or your astrological question answered by Carol Young, just fill out the coupon on page 143, or the one on page 144, and forward it to the address given. But remember—one coupon must accompany each request for service. If you wish to take advantage of more than one of the services offered, send a coupon for each question asked. For handwriting analysis a stamped, addressed envelope must be inclosed.

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